

THE SLOWER
JUDAS

G·B·STERN



"G. B. Stern

is a creative artist indeed. She can make flesh and bones, and the hair on the head, and the phrase in the mouth, and the way the earrings swing from the ear, into a perfectly living character. No writer of our generation has achieved anything more marvelous in the way of character-building than 'the Matriarch' whom we met in the novel of that name and meet again in *A Deputy Was King*." —Rebecca West.

"She is at once impersonal and passionate, strongly aware of injustice and misunderstanding, yet defiantly and jauntily frank."

—Francis Hackett.

Also by G. B. Stern:

DEBATABLE GROUND

THE CHINA SHOP

THE ROOM

THE BACK SEAT

SMOKE RINGS

THUNDERSTORM

THE MATRIARCH

A DEPUTY WAS KING


THE DARK GENTLEMAN

BOUQUET

DEBONAIR







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THE SLOWER JUDAS

BOOKS BY
G. B. STERN

Novels

DEBATABLE GROUND—THE CHINA SHOP

THE ROOM—THE BACK SEAT

THUNDERSTORM—THE MATRIARCH

A DEPUTY WAS KING

THE DARK GENTLEMAN—DEBONAIR

Short Stories

SMOKE RINGS—THE SLOWER JUDAS

Belles-Lettres

BOUQUET

THE SLOWER JUDAS



BY
G. B. STERN



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TO
MARGARET IRWIN

*For her help
with two stories in this book*

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LADY FALCONBRIDGE

LADY FALCONBRIDGE

I

BARBARA lay in bed. It was a deep, soft, wide bed, pushed out from the white wall of a bare country room. The dark shining floor rose and fell in uneven waves like the Downs outside the window.

They had all gone out. The house was silent; so silent that Barbara felt as though she had fallen out of noise and hilarity, into the very middle of peace. She was glad that she had broken her leg; it did not hurt her now. Thankfully, and a little incredulously, she could watch that breathless lull which comes after pain, as though watching were in itself a gracious event.

Barbara was as packed with lazy life stored up within her, as that granary which she could just see, without moving, where a corner of roof blazed into sudden yellow under a fuzz of lichen. Without moving!—She did not want to see anything that was not fixed as though into a panel within her contented range.

How long ago was that early morning when she had fallen, riding Esther's horse, because he had put his foot into a rabbit-hole? Was it a week? To-day was probably Sunday again; for downstairs, Sunday visitors were arriving in cars, a voluble crowd from some neighboring country house, a lusty chorus of voices welcoming, explaining, calling for drinks; doors banging

part, she was doomed by obstinate managers to go on and on repeating the type; forever witty, crisp, white-haired and diamonded. Therefore her friends derided her with the nickname "Lady Falconbridge." And the less sophisticated of her audiences never dreamt that Barbara was only twenty-nine, and that her real personality was rich and bountiful as a chestnut tree in flaming October.

"There was once an orange-girl in the pit of Drury Lane—" . . . What made her think of that, just now? Ah yes, he was playing . . . was it "Merrie England"? No, that thing from Sullivan's "Henry VIII":

*"Company with honesty
I love and shall until I die!"*

It had been in honest laughter and good company, at Christian Fleming's riotous first-night supper, last summer, that that odd elvish dramatist had saluted her in obsolete terms: "There was once an orange-girl—" And "hoyden" he had called her, and "romp," and "a warm-hearted baggage!" And why had he bothered to hang her all over with those tiny tinkling insults, like a harness with bells? Just because she had felt . . . so well with herself, that night?

"I feel about you, always, as though you had just been drinking wine!"

"Even—even if I haven't?" And then, with quick anger: "I don't! How dare you!"

But she had been much younger, then, or she would not have flared so ingenuously at the poet's subtle praise.

—And suddenly Barbara chuckled, irresistibly

amused at the way she lay there alone, recalling all the compliments which had twinkled in her past.

Wine?—"Henry VIII" changed into a drinking-song, as though the idle zig-zag of her thoughts were being followed by a musician unconscious that she lived or listened. Or was it she who followed?

. . . To be raised a little higher than the others in a crowd, and to lead a chorus, up and up, boldly, clearly, never straining, never breaking . . . all the time achieving that mystery they called "right on the note" . . . This was the very swing and power of gaiety, as she had always pictured it. All their voices carolling round Marie's—pretty Marie Hamel, on Christmas Eve . . . three years ago . . . in that old panelled room in the Westminster house. And Barbara herself, wanting so much to join in . . . that she forgot—until they all collapsed into laughter: "Trilby!—and oh Gawd, Svengali's dead!" Swiftly, then, she recovered her prestige by a valiant masterpiece of burlesque—and what matter that she burlesqued herself and nobody else, as long as that rollicking, jubilant, noisy performance denied her secret? For "Damn sentiment! I hate it!" quoth Lady Falconbridge.

. . . Attentive, again, she heard only the closing chords of an indomitable march—the very stir of old wars in it. "Where have I been off to?" Barbara wondered, and blinked her eyelids, for her window, facing west, was now flooded by the startling dazzle of the sun just dropped to below roof level. The immense hush gathered in all the smaller hushings and twitterings and caprices of late afternoon. And the unknown player,

downstairs, let the fugitive music slide and drift away from the familiar airs. "Making it up as you go along—fun, that must be!" . . .

A pause. Barbara was feeling vague and feverish. Drowsily she sighed, shut her eyes. . . .

And her secret tune came flying towards her, rippled past, and was gone again.

She was not even surprised. Ecstasy lay upon her lightly and warmly as a golden cloud. Entranced, she fell asleep. . . .

THE room was nearly dark, and the cool air blew in from the evening outside. For a few seconds Barbara wondered why she was so eager, instead of, as usual, reluctant, to wake and join the conscious world again. Then, with the careful creak of the door and Esther's voice, she remembered. . . .

"Feeling neglected, my dear? Didn't you hear us all coming back? Here's your supper tray."

Impetuously, Barbara sat upright, throwing back her patchwork quilt, and letting her pillow flop on to the floor: "Who was it? Esther—quick? Playing downstairs, this afternoon, while you were all out? *Esther!*"

"Did he disturb you? What a shame! I—"

"He—? *Who was it?*"

Eyes wide and dark in the lamplight. Thick square-cut chestnut hair, flung back from Barbara's flushed, Barbara's radiant face. Her voice was tense, sparkling with impatience. "Esther—can't you speak?"

"Plays well, doesn't he?" Miss Maryon teased her.

"But I had no idea you were so fond of classical music! Or did he improvise?"

"Esther, I'll kill you! Oh, curse my leg! I want to get up. I'm almost well. I must go downstairs—"

"Nonsense. Don't be a fool, Barbara. Lie still and be good. If you really want to know, it was a sea-green sea-weedy young composer playing my piano in the sitting-room all this afternoon. No, it wasn't—it was an old Maestro, quite bald, and with a long, long trailing, snowy beard. "Well—" relenting, for was it imagination that her patient was suddenly drained of all that splendid colour and glow with which she had woken from sleep?—"Well, it was the great Sir Godfrey Raikes. An odd hobby, music, isn't it, for an eminent surgeon? He was spending the week-end with the Larmont-Browns, and he wasn't keen on more motoring, so they left him behind, here, to amuse himself."

"Sir Godfrey Raikes . . ." repeated Barbara, her deep tone caressing the name. Then she poured a waterfall of entreaty and command upon her bewildered friend: "Send him up to me—Esther, you must! Yes, now, at once. *Don't*—don't stand there stuck, looking conventions at me, like an ass! I—I've got to ask him something—Just one thing, but it's important. Oh, Esther, Esther, I'm so happy, but hurry now, and tell him, and stop downstairs yourself, and it'll be all right!"

"He'd think I was mad!" Miss Maryon protested.

"*That* doesn't matter. Esther—blast you! *Move!*"

"But he's gone. He went away with the Larmont-Browns."

"Then fetch him back. At once. How dare you let him go when I was asleep!" stormed Lady Falconbridge.

"They dropped him at the station, for the London express. Barbara, you're thoroughly unreasonable, and your soup's getting cold."

"The devil's getting cold! What the hell is the use of you practical people? And here I lie, helpless. I've simply got to see another doctor, I tell you. I'm worse. Your old village lunatic is no damned good to me. Send for Sir Godfrey Raikes, professionally, to-night, or I'll die on you."

"Of a broken leg?" Esther Maryon looked sceptical. "And anyhow, he's a nose, throat and ear specialist."

"Oh God!" Barbara gave up the struggle. Her glare of a thwarted tigress gradually changed into her own irresistible grin. "Sorry, Esther. Where's my supper? I'm gloriously hungry! I shall have to wait, that's all. . . ."

II

SHE waited for five weeks. And now she was listening, waiting for his voice. As a child stresses the little things that do not matter, she prayed that his first word to her, his first of all, need not be "Hello?"

. . . "Lady Falconbridge?" came the question over the telephone.

Her breath failed. "Why—why do you call me that?"

"Forgive me. Has there been a mistake? My man said that a Lady Falconbridge wished to speak to me in person, and that the matter was urgent."

If only she were telephoning him, not stiffly any more, as a stranger, but as his dearest, his most privileged woman! So her longing must have leapt forward from the present, and involuntarily given her nickname instead of her name to that awe-inspiring Harley Street man-servant. Barbara smiled even through her agitation. Probably many of Sir Godfrey Raikes' patients were titled—what was one aristocrat more or less?

"I'm Barbara Falconbridge. I'm an actress. Your man didn't quite understand." Then she summoned her wits and her pride to help her. This was no way to play a part from which all happiness depended. Hush . . . he was speaking again, less formally, as though from the stalls he had seen and liked a stately dowager with silver hair and crisp cynical speeches.

"You wished to make an appointment with me? I hope the trouble isn't serious?"

"It is. It's very serious indeed, Sir Godfrey. How soon can you come to me."

"Your throat?" He ignored what she knew was a lapse from medical etiquette.

"My ear. Can you—can you see me soon?"

Silence, while he consulted his engagements; and she wondered how to still the unbearable thumping of her heart. "Aren't you nervous on the first-nights?" People had often asked, and she had replied, lightly: "I'm never nervous!" . . .

"To-day is Tuesday. I could see you here on Friday at 10.30. Or at five. But if you prefer it, I can arrange the hour with your doctor." Distinct reproof in this.

"I haven't got one," laughed Barbara, suddenly scorn-

ful of all the traditional anterooms and barriers. This was nonsense; she had waited too long already; this—this Eminence was a man, after all, not a divinity. Delicate manœuvres were over, now. She had to meet him, and to meet him here, on her own ground, not—heaven help her!—in a consulting-room!

“Look here, Sir Godfrey—I’ll be frank with you. I’m usually a terribly healthy creature, and I simply can’t produce a neat, suitable doctor. I’ve got one in Wiltshire, where I’ve lately had a broken leg, but that’s rather a long way off. You must be bored with G. P.’s yourself—confess it!—so let’s agree to waive him altogether. It’s late; you can’t be expecting any more patients to-day. Come round and see me now. I’d be so grateful. . . .”

“I don’t usually go and see my patients in their own homes.”

But he was—loosening. She could hear that, at once. So he was responsive to the rich golden coaxing of her voice, was he? To her voice, that could achieve every change of beauty—while it only spoke. She was conscious, too, that he was surprised, not unnaturally, that she sounded so youthful.

“I know. I know. I’m violating majesty. I’m not treating you as though you were God and Harley Street.”

“Ah—please!”

“But really and truly—it isn’t a lack of respect. If you could only see me . . . *stiff* with respect for you and the whole medical register—anthems and ritual and the Lancet—I’m on my knees to the Lancet!”

"I'll tell them," in grave answer from the other end of the telephone.

And now she did not mind any more! now she might mock and even bully him . . . now she was sure that she could prevail. What a blessing was charm, sheer brazen charm, thought Barbara.

"But I've a horror of your waiting-room, and being summoned in low well-trained tones, and of that muffled walk down the passage, and the famous man rising from his seat at the desk. . . . Truthfully, it makes me shudder! You can never guess how it adds panic to being panic-stricken already. I could . . . bear your visit, Sir Godfrey, but I can't bear to be your visitor!"

"Must it be this evening? Is your ear very bad?"

"You can't guess how bad it is!" Barbara's voice quivered.

"You can't wait—"

"Not any longer," she whispered.

But he heard her—and yielded.

And at once became extremely professional. "Very well. Your address is—? Ah, yes. Not ten minutes by car. You've no idea, I suppose, of the nature of your trouble?"

"The nature of my trouble is obscure. . . ." But instead of the stilted phrase, she might have been crooning a joyous lullaby.

"Painful?"

"You'll cure me."

"Don't be too sanguine."

"I am! I am!"

He smiled, as he rang off.

EVERYBODY had heard of him, and nobody knew him. In vain Barbara had tried to meet Sir Godfrey Raikes, when she rushed back to town after her period of inactivity, convalescent in Esther Maryon's house on the Downs. But it seemed as though goblins were leagued to thwart her, and to baffle her quest. Even the Larmont-Browns refused to form the link between her and the man who had played her tune, when, tormented to a state of desperation, she had begged Esther to apply to them for what she hoped might look like a chance introduction. The Larmont-Browns rather coldly ignored the suggestion, deciding, in private conclave, that "Godfrey would probably not care about it! For after all . . ."

After all, and even in these days . . . an actress, and such a highly-coloured type?—And he had his position to consider. . . . And how strange of the woman, to be running after Godfrey. . . . Didn't she know that Joan—?

The Hon. Joan Lacey, his pretty patrician fiancée, was their cousin once removed. So there appeared to be every reason why Barbara Falconbridge was superfluous.

Sir Godfrey Raikes! Sir Godfrey Raikes! Can no one lead me to Sir Godfrey Raikes? To and fro she had wandered, seeking an approach, pressed back by invisible walls.

At last her patience broke its tether. How silly it was, how missish, timidly hanging about on the outskirts of a famous man's acquaintance! Was she not Barbara Falconbridge, no less than he surrounded by admirers

glad of her faintest encouragement? And besides, though strangers still, did not Godfrey and Barbara share a secret?

So, on a brave impulse, she rang him up on the telephone, and summoned him. Actresses belonged to the public—Why, and so did doctors, even the greatest! See how easy it was . . . thought Barbara, striving to be lordly in scorn of her own gathering fear, as she sat motionless by the fire of October logs, or paced her tall white sitting-room, waiting for him. . . . See how easy! I summoned him, and he is on his way.

But that was unreal as a dream. And more unreal than any dream, the sound of his car stopping in the quiet street outside her house. And his ring at the bell. And her old servant announcing: "Sir Godfrey Raikes."

He wondered why she did not rise at his entrance, from the low chair by the fire, but remained so still, with intent gaze lifted towards him. Behind her, across three high windows from floor to ceiling, hung a straight wall of tapestry curtains, bold crimson and purple and damson blended in a bacchanalian pattern. The tall white room was only lit by the fire and one corner lamp.

Why, this woman was beautiful, young and beautiful. Her big sweet mouth was generously fashioned, like a child's. From either cheek, the thick chestnut hair stood out in square carving. An impression flickered over the surgeon's mind, that she belonged to a period that always wore brocade, stiff spreading skirts and pointed bodice; a fancy not only due to her dress, dim stripes of plum-blue and silvery fawn. But he had seen many ladies, and Joan Lacey herself, wearing that sort of

'robe de style,' lately. Yet coming to Barbara Falconbridge in this room, he imagined . . . a king with long black curls and a swarthy, twinkling smile. . . .

The fleet idea glimmered and passed. Sir Godfrey advanced formally, and held out his hand:

"Are you my patient?"

She was standing by now, and he could see that she was of his own height, and royally built. The colour of battle flooded her white face. She shook her head, and answered:

"No."

"I beg your pardon. Your aunt, perhaps? Shall I go up to her?"

"You have no patient," said Barbara, in mutiny against the very lie which brought him here. She saw then that he carried a small leather bag. "Are these your instruments? I'm so sorry. I *am* Barbara Falconbridge, but I wasn't telling the truth over the telephone. My ears are sound. I haven't had the smallest trouble or pain, ever, except with my broken leg, and that's healed. So you see, Sir Godfrey, I don't need professional attendance from Harley Street."

"You don't need me?" with a quick irritable frown.

"I don't need professional attendance," she repeated.

"May I ask, in that case, for what whim—"

"It wasn't—oh, do believe that it wasn't just a whim!"

For she had always revolted from those languid despotic beauties who, in their treatment of men, deemed the invention of manners only meet for women who were plain and unknown. How could she ever explain the ridiculous significance, to her, of finding the origin of a

mere splinter of tune? Where, at what point, could she even begin to justify her freak of behaviour, her unreasonable lapse from courtesy, to this handsome frigid stranger, whose strong thin face was a very hatchet of rage?

"As I can be of no possible use to you, I may as well go. I'm a busy man, and unsociable." He turned away from her, towards the door.

"Did I say that you were of no use to me, Sir Godfrey? Did I?" Such a dance of mischief in her voice, not to let him suspect that even her audacious heart was twanging apprehension. Oh God—and if she failed? If here were a lost cause? "Help me?" she cried, in sudden anguish, and arrested him at the very threshold. The cry was real, but she wrapped it quickly in a cloak of mocking obeisance: "Sir Godfrey, you who are so wonderful, such a distinguished star and ornament in your profession, perhaps you could give me—ah, surely you can give me . . . an ear for music?"

If he were angry before, he was twenty times more furious now. What sort of a mad temerity was this, to summon him with a falsehood, and dismiss him with a gibe? The wench was not worth the swearing at! But leave her, and quickly—

. . . "Sir Godfrey!" the whisper trembled across the room, but hardly reached him. And in spite of his resolution, he stopped once more, for the sound of his name was softly, strangely different, and wholly without impudence, now. "Sir Godfrey, before you go, won't you, at least, tell me what was that little tune you played—five weeks ago—when they motored you over from

Stoniton and left you alone in the sitting-room downstairs?"

Surprised, after a moment he remembered the occasion. "I must have played a hundred tunes," he said, still impatient with her press-gang methods. "What can it matter?"

"It was one—with a sort of lilt. . . . It has always been running through my head. Always, as long as I can remember. But I couldn't trace it from outside. Nobody else seemed to know it, or perhaps they didn't recognize it when I hummed it. I've got no ear, they say. And then—you played it, just once, between a lot of other tunes. I was upstairs, half asleep, half listening . . . And I heard it! I heard it!"

Perplexed by her queer excitement, by this legend of a forgotten tune, it could not leave him quite unmoved. "Tell me why it is so important?" he enquired, more gently than he had hitherto spoken since learning how she had hoaxed him.

"Honestly, Sir Godfrey, if it hadn't meant all that to me, I would never have—I would never have presumed . . . to cause you so much trouble and inconvenience." The stilted apology came quaintly from her lips. But her distress was obviously genuine. "I can't tell you, either, why it's so important, except that to me it is. Like religion—or oughtn't I to say that? I've always felt that when I could meet it outside my brain—and join up with it . . . I'd be perfectly gloriously happy. Happier than anyone has ever been before."

"You're not unhappy, usually?"

"No, oh no, I have a good time—a good gay time. But—"

"Words without music," he suggested. And was staggered at her response, like a radiant burst of sun between bars of cloud.

"Yes—oh yes, then you do know! You've forgiven me! And—my tune?"

"Child, I played so many tunes that afternoon. How did yours go?"

She tried to sing it, but could not. And tried again. And again. That lovely tender little snatch of song which had haunted all her days—where was it? Shut up inside her head, where it could never escape. Standing up, there, in front of Godfrey Raikes, her hot fingers twisting behind her back, Barbara struggled to set free her bird, her bird. . . . She sang it all wrong. It was not her tune at all, which came out from between her lips. It was not any tune. Just funny noises, up and down. His serious listening face showed no sign of enlightenment. Esther had said he was very musical. Then this must be dreadful for him . . . though he did not wince. She had had it rubbed into her, so often and crudely, how "very musical" people reacted to her performances. Suddenly Barbara felt hysterical with shame. . . . Her refuge, her one refuge, from such fiascos as these was in hilarious burlesque, thus to bluff her audience into believing that she, too, found it comic.

With head thrown back, hands on hips, she laughed and laughed at his impregnable severity. . . .

"Well, but aren't you glad, now, that you came? No

compliments for me, Sir Godfrey? No flattering speeches?—"You nightingale!" and "A river of liquid gold in your throat!"—"Why, I can't have done myself justice—I must sing again . . . a female Orpheus to move this stone! Listen!—One tune is as good as another:

"Company with honesty

I love, and shall until I die."

. . . For idleness is chief mistress—"

I swear, you're no musician after all, not to melt to this glorious ringing swinging contralto of mine! Man, they've offered me a thousand pounds if only I'd sing for one night in the Albert Hall! My jealous rivals have offered me ten thousand, not to! That one little tune . . . Listen again—you've lost your ear, Sir Godfrey, there's the trouble! Or else you're an impostor! You've lost your true ear for music!"

. . . He still heard peals of wild laughter at her own jest, as he ran down the stairs and into the hall. God!—what *actress* behaviour! "Didn't know they made 'em like that, nowadays!" Sir Godfrey Raikes picked up his silk hat, his stick, his gloves, and stepped into the waiting car. His visit was over.

Upstairs, Barbara sobbed and did not sing again. . . .

III

BUT HE could not forget her. There she was, Barbara Falconbridge, forever rippling through his head . . .

like the fragment of a tune. A lunatic tune, to fiddle on the senses of a sane Harley Street specialist. Sane—yes, that was it—and now, in poignant irony, he too was possessed. Barbara . . . Barbara . . . just her sweetness, her spurts of lovely gaiety, her voice—when she spoke. . . . Godfrey smiled grimly at the mental amendment! . . . She had sat by the fire, those rich curtains behind her, and her wide skirt spread around the chair, waiting for him. And he had been sombre and chill as a cave, wrapped up in his own offended importance. Barbara Falconbridge, big ruddy ardent Barbara! divine teasing Barbara, laughing at him, laughing at herself, praying for his pardon with such shy bravery. To have hurt her—it was like bruising fruit. Yet if he had been a fool once, he was wise now; and could hail and clasp this gift that romance had flung him, this splash of gold out of the grey, this sudden bubbling up at his feet of clear water from the desert sand. Barbara . . . she was wheat and wine. . . . And what a feeble thread of a maid Joan Lacey appeared in contrast, how sparse in her joys, how meagre in her dreams and sorrows!

Barbara . . .

For only a very brief while he fought to be free of her. Then he surrendered to the strength of the storm which swept him, and swept away self-interest and prudence and his pledged word, as though they were straws indeed. He broke off the engagement which matched so well with his career; and leaving the Hon. Joan Lacey comforted by the impression that his reason was too shattered to be aware of what he was doing, he drove

his car in a frenzy back to the house which not long ago he had quitted in a rage.

"Sir Godfrey Raikes."

The announcement was a miracle, but Barbara's nature was a bowl to accept miracles, and not spill them with plunging and questionings. Here was Godfrey, here with his arms around her, his cheek harsh against her bare shoulder. . . .

She was rapt in happiness, while over and over again he murmured her name "Barbara."

And then, abruptly: "How soon will you marry me?"

She pushed away from him. Amused, he watched her air of determination, as still not yielding a word, she searched the upper bookshelves. Godfrey remained mutely appreciative of her arms in an ivory arch, high above her head. Then she turned towards him, holding out a volume of Shakespeare:

"You must know, before we. . . . It might make a difference—oh, not in you, but being a great doctor. Please find it: 'King John'—and look in the list of characters. I acted in it, once, long ago, my first engagement, on tour in repertory, but the play wasn't popular."

Obediently, he found what she required. She looked over his shoulder. . . .

"You see?—*There!*" And uttered a childish cry of surprise: "Oh damn! I've spelt it wrong, all this time, and never knew!"

He read: "Faulconbridge, a Bastard."

"I like it better without the 'u' . . ." Godfrey smiled into the serious eyes undaunted beneath the straight

line of her brows. Not shame, but the endeavor not to afflict him with embarrassment, had flushed her scarlet.

"Oh—but the 'u' is nothing. I showed you because—You *have* understood, haven't you? You do understand that Falconbridge is only my stage name, and that . . . I chose it on purpose?"

"It's an excellent name, Barbara, and it suits you."

Uncertain at first, she relaxed at his matter-of-fact tone. Back came her sparkle, the tender curve to her lips. "I thought you might mind, because of our children." Barbara was always deliciously frank.

"Darling, darling, it's good enough for any child of mine, to have 'Lady Falconbridge' for a mother."

. . . Nevertheless, and through the rich englamoured moments which followed, trooping in splendour and commanded by invisible trumpets, Barbara was shaken with a tremor of foreboding. She had always seemed aware of three barriers, difficult and huge as mountains, which would have to be crossed before she reached the fulfilment. The first, that she should hear her secret tune from outside . . . and that had only happened after twenty-nine years of patient waiting. The second, that along with it should come neither hate nor indifference, but love . . . and not without hard battle, and a piteous wounding which she had felt as though it were across her throat, did Sir Godfrey Raikes become Godfrey and her lover.

But this third test of her luck—had proved too easy. The high ridge was an illusion . . . surmounted in an instant. It was unsafe, it was somehow terrible, that it should have been so easy. . . .

IV

BARBARA and Godfrey were having supper alone together in her house. It was the eve of their wedding-day. They had been invited to the usual score of parties, for Barbara was popular, and Godfrey—as she wickedly reminded him—was eminent. But they had preferred this intimate Chinese puzzle, and themselves at the heart of it: a small round table in a small round room in a house so tender and protective, that it drew to-morrow nearer and yet nearer . . . instead of separating it from their longing, by an atmosphere of rowdy celebration.

“Do you hate giving up the stage, Barbara Falconbridge?” but he asked the question confident of her derisive answer.

“Ah, my empty silent future,” scoffed Barbara, who had never cared the wick of a candle about her professional career. She was too creative, exuberantly creative, to be satisfied with anything so inhuman as art.

“Ah, those evenings, when bored and dull, I shall have nothing to do but sit moping in my home, yearning for the dear, dear smell of the footlights. . . . Godfrey, you’ll never forget, will you, that I sacrificed the Smell of the Footlights, for you?”

“Never,” solemnly. “But it’s just not too late to draw back. To-morrow it will be irrevocable. Though you look like a bride already. . . .” For white, pure white brocade, was Barbara’s gown, exquisitely formal, tiny bright leaves running in a border round the hem of it, pointed bodice and wide skirt. . . . Curtsey in that

gown! dance in it and show your leaf-green shoes! a gown of gleaming armour, in which to wait and wait, showing naught of your grief. . . . But if you once gave up hope, wearing that gown, soft pure snow with its budding bright green leaves, ah, then you would be crushed for ever. . . .

Godfrey, for joy of possessing her, burst into full-throated song from "The Yeoman of the Guard":

"'Tis done, I am a bride!" . . .

"I'd better beat on the table with my spoon," exclaimed Barbara, impatiently. "I *must* make a din, somehow. . . . No, Godfrey darling, it's not an egg-shell subject—the whole world knows that I can't sing, and *want* to sing—want to, want to!"

"It doesn't hurt you, then, when you hear yourself?" asked Godfrey, deeply interested in the phenomenon.

Her laugh was rueful but acquiescent. "I see that I needn't have told you to tread delicately and spare my feelings!"

"Darling, sweetheart, *darling*, I'm sorry—"

"Oh, it's not when you're miserable, but when you're terribly happy, it's then that you let yourself go, at last, because you have to, and it sounds beautiful and lovely and ecstatic, even though the key might be wrong now and then . . . but your own inside singing is getting it right, and you let loose a triumphant wail, and that excites you wildly because it's so almost what you remember the tune to be like!—and who cares when you're alone and your heart has been so pressed down with happiness that you have to let it out and out and up—or else die. And then someone comes along, and

says coldly: "You're nowhere near the note, and anyhow what a row!" " . . . Barbara sighed. "Was there ever a greater fool?" she demanded; "actually, of my own free will, to be marrying a man who's a musician, 'a-composer-in-his-spare-time'!" She took a luscious pear, and bit into it.

Godfrey filled up her glass and his own with golden Château Yquem, and swore, as he set the bottle down, that Barbara should fill their house with her carolling, whenever she pleased, nor ever be checked for reasons that were obviously fanatical and arbitrary. . . . "Barbara, you're not giving your full attention to the eminent man. And he was using such grand words."

"I was . . . in a way. Yes, I *was* giving him my full attention, but not exactly now. Ever so far ahead. Godfrey," very earnestly she regarded him, her chin propped on her hands, "if our child, our first child, our daughter, should sing—in a proper worldly way, I mean, like her father—then, promise to God, I'll be silent for ever, because it'll be as good as my own voice just to hear her. Only I couldn't bear her to laugh at me. You and everybody else, but not her. Only if she's like me, in that other way—and I shall know at once!—oh, then we'll have concerts together, she and I, highly exclusive concerts—and let our voices *rip!*"

"Which would you rather?"

"If she sings," Barbara argued, slowly and tenderly, as though she were shining through a mist, "if she sings, then—then I'll have pride, instead, to satisfy me. And I can wait, too, for my concerts. One of *her* children, perhaps; say her third child. . . . It's like a tree, God-

frey, growing and spreading, and already I'm sitting in the shade of it!"

He was amazed at her fervency, amazed and almost frightened. "Would you hate being married to me, Barbara, if we had no children?"

"It would be so silly and incomplete, wouldn't it? I can't imagine, somehow. . . . Godfrey, it wouldn't be—music."

Thus 'Lady Falconbridge,' the actress who could not sing in tune. The man smiled at the enigma, exulting in her warmth, her fertility, her abundant splendour of health; exulting, aloud, in the nearness of their wedding-day. Only a single parting of sleep. . . . "And you won't be late, and keep me waiting, Barbara? I shall be in a fever. You're such an unpunctual baggage. Even for supper this evening, in your own home—"

"Sweetheart, my clock had stopped!"

"You shan't have that excuse, at least!"

A beautiful clock of Limoges enamel stood on her mantelpiece, inlaid with a picture of King Francis the First winding a horn, and the words, in old French: "*Tout est perdu fors l'honneur.*" . . . An elderly connoisseur who had wanted to marry Barbara Falconbridge, had given her this treasure from his collection, for her twentieth birthday. She was thinking of him, now, a little abstractedly, as she watched Godfrey with great care set the hands of the clock to the right hour, and then, humming the while, wind it up. . . .

"—*That's it!*" cried Barbara.

She had identified it at last, her secret tune. Here it was, with all its old rippling radiant associations . . .

happiness and happy lovers and love quivering towards fulfilment . . . Her secret tune that she had heard and lost again.

And now found.

"What is it, Godfrey, what is it?"

Startled by her joyous cry, Godfrey quickly put down the clock. "Child, I nearly dropped it. That tune? Did I really play it at Stoniton? It's an old jingle that my father used to sing when we were children. A big jolly laughing man with dark red hair—always in a good temper, and always doing odd jobs up and down the house. I believe the words of that tune have actually something to do with a clock going round, and that's why . . ."

Barbara did not hear any more. In a sudden mental flash, evoked by this picture, she remembered a man who sometimes came to stay with her mother, when she herself was a very small child. A big jolly laughing man, with chestnut hair. . . . And he was standing up in front of the fireplace, a clock in his hand, winding it, and singing that tune.

Her pretty, frail, slender mother, dancing and flying through the shabby rooms. . . . Happy. . . . Happy as Barbara whenever Godfrey was there.

So her instinct had been true, to feel that the secret tune sped along in company with the meeting of lovers. Only why had she been so sure, so sure that it was a forerunner of her own love-story?

With despair in her heart, she told her half-brother.

For one agonized moment, he, not she, he, the famous

doctor, was swept by a hurricane desire to defy the impossible. . . .

"It's *not* impossible, Barbara, beloved! We might—even without children—" But then he heard an echo of her voice. . . . "It would be so silly and incomplete . . . I can't imagine, somehow. . . . Godfrey, it wouldn't be music!"

Like a flight of birds past his window, he saw her thoughts appear and vanish. . . .

A MAN AND HIS MOTHER

A MAN AND HIS MOTHER

MRS. WICKHAM read the letter with feelings of dismay that would have amazed any mother who knew how hard it was to draw writings of romantic affection from a son in the Colonies.

"My darling Mummy,

"Fourteen years—and now I am, I actually am, on my way home to see you at last. And not poor, either. No, rather not. We've been swinging along splendidly with the old Stores, the last three or four years. Opened up branches all over the country. I haven't said much about it in my letters—saving up for the fun of surprising you suddenly. I sold out my share to J. D. Harris—you know, the tools and hardware man—and I'll be with you at Monte Vittorio about as soon as this letter. You're not going to work any more, Mummy darling—"

Sophia Wickham halted and gasped; she knew what was coming; an unconvincing picture of her future as a sweet old lady with white curls, crossing mittened hands by the chimney-corner. . . . Really, Bruce had grown most disgustingly sentimental. That came of letting a boy grow from eighteen to thirty-two far away from the slapping realities of home life. Once he begins to imag-

ine that the roses round the door have a stimulating effect upon his filial devotion. . . .

She went on reading the letter. Oh, yes, here it was:

"You're just going to wear grey silk dresses, and sit comfortably in the biggest armchair money can buy, and enjoy life, and grow plump and rosy and idle. I'm sure you're too thin. You haven't sent me a photo for ages."

Mrs. Wickham had now reached the stage of avoirdupois when she dared not face the camera, for fear of the overwhelming proofs of her existence that would be sent her ten days later. She certainly took up an imposing amount of room in the world. But Bruce's solicitude about her health was touching. Bruce had a sweet unselfish nature, and he was her only son, and he was coming home to her. . . . Well, well—after all these years! And with plenty of money, too. How marvellously opportune—(but any moment of Mrs. Wickham's career during her merry and unscrupulous sixties would have been equally opportune).

She had been wondering how to stave off Signora Ardinelli and her threat of having the furniture removed.

From this point onwards, in the letter, Bruce's imagination flowed in a limpid silvery stream. The words "socks," "work-basket," and "garden" played their parts. His mother, it seemed, was to be allowed the not too strenuous task of snipping off the heads of faded sweet-peas, allowing them to tumble into the basket she held on her arm. And she could darn his socks, and

listen to his confidences in the firelight, and go for drives with him, or very short slow walks, leaning contentedly on his arm. And he would buy her lace.

"Don't think that I don't understand, old lady, that you've had a pretty putrid time ever since my father died—"

Sorrowfully must it be related here that Mrs. Wickham had since then owned and discarded another husband, a Roumanian aristocrat, of whom Bruce mercifully knew nothing.

"You've worked like hell, pinched and screwed and worn yourself out. And I haven't been able to stand by you as I should, till now. However, everything comes to her who waits. We'll have a cheery old-fashioned Christmas—even at Monte Vittorio, for I imagine you won't want to be moved—"

"Not even in a bath-chair!" from Mrs. Wickham, in scornful parenthesis, "Goodness—does the boy think me feeble—at sixty-four?"

Apparently the boy did. For:

"I warn you, Mums, I've grown into a very large and masterful bully, and awful things will happen to you if you try and run round and wait on me, because I won't have it. Women, bless 'me, are like that. I know, though I haven't been robbed of my heart yet. Funny, isn't it? So you'll have to act as my sweetheart as well. Better than having to put up with a rival, isn't it? D'you know, Mums, I believe I must be difficult to please over girls—or perhaps I'm a bit of a cynic—"

Mrs. Wickham, who was indeed a bit of a cynic, laughed—and then groaned.

The letter concluded with protestations of affection and a renewed promise of lace—lots of lace.

The moment has arrived when Sophia must be betrayed—if she has not already betrayed herself. She was a rake. A rake of the Hogarthian era, robust and jolly and somewhat high in flavour. Except for her brief period as the wife of Count Ronatzi—a pale impermanence who drooped against her strength, and then faded back into the Balkans—Mrs. Wickham's rakishness never developed towards amorous adventure. She did not giggle and paint her face and dance, and dress in too juvenile a style. No, it was *enterprise* that fascinated her. Her restless energy was boundless; her optimism so flaring a rose-red that it stunned you into agreement, even if at first you thought you saw black. She possessed to a degree of dangerous art, the power to persuade first herself, and then other people, into a sheer swindle. She had a hundred irons in the fire, a hundred cards up her sleeve, a thousand excuses for each collapse. She peppered her past with lies, till you would imagine each episode would rise and sneeze in sheer protest. Her pluck was a phoenix that rose glittering and triumphant out of the ashes of her many failures.

Briefly, if you should ask what Mrs. Wickham actually did, she "ran" things. Shady activities on the continent were her particular stunt. She organized places of entertainment; she advertised quacks; she touted for insurances; she was agent for land and houses; she man-

aged boarding-houses; she owned part shares in casinos and magazines and gramophone companies and bathing-huts; she invested, and promoted, and advised and promised fortunes; she loaned out cars—never her own! She discovered and boomed the health-giving properties of certain mysterious mineral waters. She was “behind”; she “pulled strings”; she had “influence.” And then she juggled with the whole lot, and came out smiling and rosy, without a penny either of her private property nor of those who had entrusted her with theirs . . . and quite ready to begin all over again from the beginning.

A man, really, this Mrs. Wickham. A pirate. A gay good fellow with a bad name.

But not a mother—at least, not a dear old mother.

And here was Bruce, complete with lace and illusions, almost at the front door of the Pensione Bella Vittoria.

So Mrs. Wickham sent for Jelf, and they drank a couple of gin-and-bitters each, in consultation.

As all menservants appear for some mysterious reason to have names which begin with a J., there will be no difficulty in recognising Mrs. Wickham’s respectful servitor for what he was. His demeanour was impeccable; his resource had often saved her reputation from bankruptcy, and a great many varieties of fraudulent charges in a great many countries. He never reminded her of these. His habitual air was of a deeply injured person on the very verge of giving notice. He did not enjoy life, but he did enjoy a gin-and-bitters. It is to be presumed that he also enjoyed the society of Mrs.

Wickham, or he would not have followed her jaunty but precarious passage along the very edge of the law and sometimes over, during the last twenty years.

She had no secrets from Jelf.

"I think if I were you, Madam, I should settle down for a bit, in the way Master Bruce wants you to. It might be safer. You know, Madam, Signora Ardinelli wants her fifty per cent, for letting you the Casino for the season—otherwise she says she'll close it up. And it hasn't paid its way yet, has it, Madam?"

"Only because the municipality has forbidden gaming!" cried Mrs. Wickham.

"Yes, Madam, or perhaps because the band heard they were not to be salaried for the first month, and packed their instruments and went away. And that case over the license will be brought on soon—nobody knows yet that it's you behind the name, but they might at any moment. And I'm sorry to have to worry you, Madam, but Cerutti's won't let us have any more meat on credit, and the furniture dealer in Porto Genario—I can't pronounce his name, I'm afraid—is threatening to put in his men unless he gets paid. And that would be a pity, Madam, as the pension is just beginning to fill up nicely, and they seem to be taking to the mineral water. Miss Brownlow's instalment is due, Madam. And from what I hear, the two English ladies to whom you let Palazzo Castiglione, moved in yesterday and are not very pleased with it."

"What do they complain of, Jelf? It has a lovely view."

"Yes, Madam, but no bathroom and no water laid

on. I think you promised them both. And the damp, and the rats in the walls. And half-an-hour from the station, Madam, and no road up. It's a bit inconvenient, as you might say. Especially with this heavy rain, and several of the windows not in their places."

"I can't help the rain."

"No, Madam."

"Some people seem to think it's always sun and blue skies on the Riviera."

"Yes, Madam. I must trust they will not recognise you as the Brito-Mediterranean House Agency. The young man in the office is quite discreet, I believe. We haven't been able to let Villa Glicini to the Raeburns, as we hoped, have we, Madam?"

"No. I can't get the three references. I gave Baldi's name, thinking he wouldn't mind, and he's asked me to withdraw it. It's very awkward, Jelf."

"Yes, Madam. I think, if I were you, I'd retire for a little with Mr. Bruce. You need a rest, I'm sure. Go and stay quiet-like at Villa Glicini yourself, perhaps, and let him find you there. Being two stations away, you could, so to speak, withdraw connection from Monte Vittorio just till things settled down—"

"Or up?" Mrs. Wickham's eyes twinkled shrewdly. "Well, I'll take your advice, Jelf. Signorina Prossi can run the pension for me, meanwhile, I suppose. She's a fool—but not more than most people!"

Fortunately Mrs. Wickham's appearance was not of the kind to shock even the most sentimental of sons, and therefore needed no sudden, violent alteration, such as

might have astonished the natives. All the mellowing disguises were for the soul. Bruce was surprised, certainly, to find her looking so impressively large and healthy. But the black dress and the silver hair were quite in keeping, and so were the few natural tears she shed in his arms on his arrival at Monte Vittorio. The faithful Jelf was also in the atmosphere; and Bruce liked the friendly room with its work-basket and footstool, and view across a few intervening vineyards to the Mediterranean.

"I bet you sat here often, looking at the sea, and wondering whether any of the big ships was my ship," laughed Bruce, in tender exultation.

Mrs. Wickham smiled reminiscently . . . though of course she had been much too busy ever to do anything so fatuous. Then she rumbled his hair. . . .

"My boy!" and "How big and strong you've grown!"

It really wasn't at all bad for a few days. Bruce's protective care for her was charming, and different from anything else she had encountered, since the death of his father, Edmund Wickham, twenty-nine years ago. She was entertained, too, by his care in eliminating for her benefit all gross and worldly details from his language and conversation, lest he should upset her. Never dreaming that she, glorious old ruffian, had acquired wisdom and toughness far beyond his, to tolerate facts connected with the Sin and the Fall. And she, too, watched her language very carefully. They were as two who had been washed white in new milk. Mrs. Wickham began to find it all rather insipid. She was bored, too, with nothing to do but rest, calmly and sweetly, with the

evening-of-her-days arranged by Bruce in a sort of serene halo round her head.

"We'll go to England presently, old lady, when the mild weather begins, and I'll rummage round Kent or Sussex till I find a little house with a garden. Somewhere near where father was born would be all right, because then you could fit in again with all sorts of pleasant old people in the neighbourhood. The real old county kind, you know."

Mrs. Wickham knew. She knew, too, vividly, how the real old county kind would regard her and her adventurous career.

"That will be very nice, darling. The dear Rector! . . ." for she numbered good acting among her other unsuitable accomplishments, and could hardly forbear from adding subtle touches of perfection to the creation of lavender and gentle dependence, which Bruce called mother.

Bored . . . bored . . . bored! She tried to lure Jelf into giving her private information on the state of the various pies from which she had reluctantly withdrawn her fingers. But Jelf proved a poor ally. He treated Mrs. Wickham's present as infinitely superior to her past—which, indeed, was better forgotten. In vain she invited him, in Bruce's occasional absence, to a convivial gin-and-bitters. Jelf was adamant. Only once did he refer directly to her liabilities, when he reminded her urgently that poor Miss Brownlow's quarterly instalment was due.

Now, where Bruce really proved annoying, was over money. He had money, a "pile," in fact, but he gave

his mother none. This was not meanness, merely the attitude of a trained soldier towards a civilian who asks for firearms. What could the sweet old soul possibly want with money, while he paid all expenses? What could she buy with money, while he so lavishly loaded her with presents? So Mrs. Wickham asked for money, and Bruce gave her lace—more lace, he felt she could never have enough lace; it was so dainty and non-explosive, and suited her so well. He gave her a Pekinese, too, and a maid, and several embroidered cushions. And lace. . . .

“Bruce, dear, I wonder if you could give me six thousand lire?”

He whistled in mock horror at her extravagant request. “Tell me what you want costing six thousand lire, old lady, and I’ll get it for you.”

“A charity I’m very interested in.”

Ah! *Charity!* he’d forgotten that, in his collection of Pastimes to be Encouraged for the Silver-haired.

“Poor Miss Brownlow—such a sad case. She’d inherited just enough money to help her in her old age; asthma, you know, Bruce—she wasn’t a young woman any more, by any means, and the doctors had recommended a winter on the Riviera. That was, let me see, four years ago. She was persuaded by a well-meaning speculator to sink all she had into starting some tea-rooms over at San Guiseppe. She was put in as manageress, and given a good percentage, and of course it ought to have been a triumphant success, but it wasn’t. It failed.”

“What a shame!” cried Bruce hotly.

"Well, of course, dear, we mustn't be hard on her. She did her best, only she was too timid for her job. It needed a woman with . . . dash."

"I can't stand women with dash, always barging about in a hurry—trying to rule everybody's roost as well as their own. What I meant was a beastly shame, was persuading your Miss Brownlow to risk her savings in anything at all unsafe. Whatever scoundrels are responsible—"

"Yes, dear, that's what they feel, I'm sure." Mrs. Wickham did not think it necessary for the poignancy of the story, to mention that "they" were herself. "And her asthma has made her practically bedridden—" and Mrs. Wickham was meanwhile burdened, by contract and by conscience, with her victim's very existence—five thousand lire each quarter-day, until, some day, she could free herself by returning poor Miss Brownlow's entire invested capital.

Bruce graciously handed over the six thousand lire to his mother—a thousand more than was required. And Mrs. Wickham handed over four thousand lire to poor Miss Brownlow, with apologies that she had to make it a thousand less than was promised.

Mrs. Wickham had quite legitimately intended to pay one-third of her bill for the Pension's meat, with the extra two thousand lire. But then she heard, through her maid, of some wonderful old walnut being put up to auction; and bought in, via one of her agents, several really good pieces, because she remembered there was an American who was furnishing Villa Margarita and very keen on antiques. But unluckily he had recently

lost his wife and given up the villa and gone back to America, so Mrs. Wickham was compelled to re-sell the furniture at a loss of seven hundred lire, and gave the remaining sum to the pasticceria, to whom, after all, she owed rather more than to the butcher.

“Mother, I met a girl to-day”—so casually he mentioned it, that she knew at once it was a girl of the utmost importance.

“Where, Bruce?”

“Among that tangle of wild fig and olives, up the hill towards the old tower. It was all rather a dream, really—and the names of the trees are sort of dreamy . . . like echoes . . . wild fig and the tall cypress and the vine . . . I must have done them in the classics when I was a kid. . . .”

“Well, but the girl, Bruce? A pretty Italian with a blue handkerchief knotted round her head?”

“Lord, no. No, rather not. An English girl—one of us, you know. Some brute of an agent has had the cheek to let her that mouldering ruin which he calls a palazzo—swarming with mice—leaky roof, dripping taps, miles from anywhere, no road, and a horrible dark wilderness of a garden shutting out all light. I ask you! And a splendid girl like that—and on her own, too, with no man to look after her. An English girl, Mummy! It’s an insult. I’m going to tell that scoundrelly agent just what I think of him!”

“On her own, did you say, Bruce? Dear me!” Mrs. Wickham placidly ignored the question of that scoundrelly agent.

"She's an orphan," explained Bruce, looking romantic. "She has some harmless hag in the duenna line living with her, of course. An aunt or a governess—I dunno. May I—may she—would you like her to come to tea?"

Audrey Carlyle came to tea. And Bruce's mother wore a grey silk gown with picturesque ruffles of lace; and her hair piled high; her eyes were benevolent; her gestures and voice full of gentle hospitality. Bruce was very proud of her, especially when Audrey told him, while he was showing her the view from the end of the loggia, that his mother reminded her of beautiful old miniatures and Austin Dobson's poetry.

"Yes, she's very sweet, isn't she? Bless her! And she had a hard fight to keep things going at all, while I was in South Africa. It's so jolly to be giving her everything she wants now." To himself he thought: "And how the deuce will she bear it if this perfectly heavenly girl. . . . Lord! I hope it won't break her heart or anything like that. After all, she's a widow, and I'm all she's got!"

Mrs. Wickham, watching them approach the tea-table, thought: "Nice girl! With a bit of luck he'll marry her, and then, damn it, I shall be free again!"

Over the teacups, Mrs. Wickham cooed sympathetically about the girl's troubles at Palazzo Castiglione; and, patting her hand, told her she must promise never, never to rent a place, in future, without seeing it first, or knowing something personally of the agent who was letting it.

"I know I'm an impulsive fool," Audrey confessed,

her pretty mouth drooping ruefully at the corners, "but, oh, I did so want to winter south, in Italy, and in my own house by the sea instead of a stiff hotel. And it sounded just like paradise, in the advertisement. It did, indeed."

It is a grievous but undeniable fact that Mrs. Wickham had difficulty in suppressing a chuckle of sheer gratification. She had taken a lot of trouble over that advertisement.

"I'm not sure how long Miss Hill will be able to stand it," Audrey went on. "And I—it isn't so much that I mind roughing it—only I've been fooled, and I'm disappointed."

"In yourself, my dear? Oh, but you'll learn."

"Yes. And in the Palazzo. It ought to have been splashed sunshine on the paved floors and terraces, and oranges and lemons in two golds . . . not dark and mildewy and haunted. It frightens me rather. . . . I think we'll soon have to move out, and go down into Monte Vittorio."

"You paid half the rent in advance, of course?"

"All of it! For six months!" Audrey laughed frankly at her own innocent gullibility. "I've called two or three times at the Brito-Mediterranean Agency, but there's only a downy little Italian clerk of about fifteen, in charge. He says the actual agent is away, or ill, or something."

"That kind always are," growled Bruce. "But I mean to rout him out and expose him—even if I don't give him a thundering good hiding!"

The girl's brown eyes glowed at him. She recognised his indignation as old-fashioned chivalry, and appre-

ciated it. Quite possibly she was beginning to fall in love with Bruce Wickham.

The following week they had a letter from her, saying that the dank ghosts of the Palazzo had triumphed and driven her forth; and that she and Miss Hill were temporarily established at the Pension Bella Vittoria. "Mostly English people here, and Miss Hill does so dread foreigners, so I chose this instead of the hotel. You'll both come over to dinner with me one day soon, won't you?"

MRS. WICKHAM went to dinner with her one day soon, but in a more dramatic fashion than Audrey Carlyle could have foreseen.

Bored! . . . bored! . . . bored! . . . and then the sudden arrival, one afternoon, of Signorina Prossi, temporary manageress of the pension; bathed in tears, stammering, her knees in trembling conflict, a wild flurry of gestures, incoherent explanations laced with prayer, spattered with the Italian equivalent for "I told you so."

"Be quiet," said Mrs. Wickham, sternly. Her son, by good fortune, was away for the day. "Collect yourself. State your facts. Don't hurry. I'm not angry with you. I'm sure you have acted for the best. Now—" after the excitement had subsided to a few gasps and flutterings, "what has happened?"

What had happened was that Mrs. Wickham had too long overlooked the fact that furniture must be paid for. The brokers were in possession at the pension; and all the chairs and tables, beds and cupboards and carpets,

were being busily ticketed; and the astonished visitors most of them preparing for speedy departure from the abode of disgrace.

"Silly of them," Mrs. Wickham remarked, with indomitable calm, "No need at all to fuss. You were quite right to come to me, Signorina. I will return with you to the pension now."

Jelf tried to stop her, but Mrs. Wickham was like a yacht with sails full-spread running before a mighty wind. Gone was the dull eye, gone the gentle listless voice and old-ladyish movements of the weeks that followed Bruce's return to cherish her. She was in her element again, overwhelmed with difficulties on all sides, coping with them, brain alert and full of plans, rapidly selecting, discarding, arranging—even while she packed her suitcase and told the disapproving Jelf not to be a doddering fool.

"You can't do any good, Madam."

"*Can't I!*" quoth Mrs. Wickham—and left it at that.

"And what am I to say to Mr. Bruce, when he finds you gone?"

"What you blooming well please!" replied vulgar Mrs. Wickham.

Her methods, on taking charge again at the pension, were superb. She did not abuse the broker's men—on the contrary, she made them heartily welcome. The guests, arrested in mid-packing, by a visit from Mrs. Wickham to their separate bedrooms, were given a jocular explanation of her quarrel with the furnishing firm; and their loyalty summoned to stand by an Englishwoman in a crisis. At dinner, subsequently, she ap-

peared en grande dame, overwhelming in full evening dress, black velvet and all her pearls, huge tortoiseshell comb rampant on the crest of her waves of white hair; and dispensed viands with the air of a duchess; viands which proved that her presence must have had much the same effect on the shattered nerves of the cook, as it had on the general conversation. Mrs. Wickham had never been so brilliant as that night, seated among her labelled furniture like Hannibal among the ruins of Carthage. Her gaiety was infectious, and so was her plausible pretence that brokers and such-like were of course mere incidentals and nothing to worry about. The visitors at the pension, a little dazed by all that had occurred, yet found themselves wondering why they had contemplated flight in such a hurry . . . was it not perhaps rather foolish of them? Whatever were Mrs. Wickham's quarrels with the Italian tradesmen, surely it need not concern them? Doubtless she would soon arrange matters satisfactorily. Meanwhile, they were being well entertained and well fed, and would certainly stay on, and write to their friends in England to join them at Monte Vittorio.

The situation was saved. Mrs. Wickham had carried it through on sheer magnificent sang-froid. For this was her way, to muddle and forget, and trust to haphazard, and postpone—and then, when lack of organisation had brought her to the very brink of disaster, to triumph on her personality, and on her personality alone.

She barely had time to notice Audrey Carlyle among the throng of others, or to single her out for any special distinction. "A pretty child—I daresay she'll make

Bruce happy"—for the moment Miss Hill, the chaperon, had been the lesser nonentity of the two. Miss Hill's lips had been ominously tight, and her trunk half-packed, and Mrs. Wickham had been too busy with her to bother about any effect her magical transformation from "Bruce's dear old mother" might have had on Audrey.

Bruce did not arrive to take control of affairs till about 11 o'clock that night. His very car, champing outside, bespoke his errand of hot and impatient chivalry. Mrs. Wickham was sitting alone in the drawing-room. The rest of the household had retired to their ticketed beds.

"Mother darling—why, why were you afraid to tell me you were in this mess, when I first came back from abroad? Of course I'd have understood, and paid up everything, and got rid of the whole rotten pension to someone else. What wretched luck that I was out all day to-day. I only just heard about it from Jelf, and came pelting down. You must be simply worn out, you poor sweetheart—it isn't quite your line to be a commercial genius, is it?" fondly teasing her, so that she should cease to believe him angry over the disgrace; which, as a matter of fact, he was. With Audrey staying in the house. . . . What must she have thought? *Brokers!* . . . Bruce set his mouth firmly. Well—his mother had been alone, without a man to look after her for many years; and though he had sent her money, he supposed it was natural for her to have made some feeble pathetic attempts to support herself.

Mrs. Wickham was angry, too; very angry; and, un-

like Bruce, did not even try to hide it. *Afraid* to tell him, forsooth! And a "rotten pension"—hers! His banter over her failure as a commercial genius did not go down at all well, either.

"I'm not in the least worn out, thank you, Bruce." And, indeed, she did not look it. He stared at her, arrested by the robust quality in her voice, the high flush upon her cheeks, by her very largeness, which had somehow escaped him before. "I'll be glad, certainly, if you can loan me enough to pay off this tiresome debt—"

"Loan?—why, my dearest mother—"

"Once that's off my mind, I can develop in all directions and really make things pay, now that I'm back and seeing to things myself."

Bruce found this quite humorous. He uttered one of those indulgent laughs which, from a moderately stupid man, drives a moderately intelligent woman to frenzy.

"Do you imagine, mother mine, that I'm going to let you stay here and boss a second-rate boarding-house?"

"*Let* me? Look here, Bruce . . ." and these were the last few seconds of his illusion. . . . "Look here, my lad, did *you* imagine that I was happy, stuck down with you, to mope, and prattle—and eat minced chicken with my feet on a stool and lace on my head? I'm sick to death of it, I tell you—"

"Mother—"

"Sick to death of it," she repeated violently, relishing her rebellion as though she were youth itself at the end of the Victorian era. "I'd have gone senile after a year of that. Nothing to do, nothing to do, and you to teach

me how to do it. My dear little son," with a swift recovery of her good humour, "I learnt more about life and human beings, and how to be tolerant, while you were fidgeting with mines and things in South Africa, than you'll pick up in a lifetime. I only want capital to develop Monte Vittorio—"

Bruce had got over the first disagreeable sensation of having put his foot on a step that wasn't there at the end of a staircase that was. He burst out, furious at the, to him, senseless repetition of one word: "Good Lord! *Develop!* You must have gone mad. Develop. You were perfectly sane when I left you this morning. I come back to find you swarming with brokers and talking about 'develop.' Anything more unsuitable—"

"Don't be so old-fashioned!" snapped his mother. "Unsuitable!"

"Old-fashioned!"

Each could do nothing but repeat the other's words, in a grotesque crescendo of indignation. But Mrs. Wickham had the best of the interview, because she was to her son a shock and an astonishment, whereas his behaviour was just exactly what she had expected it to be.

"You were all wrong about me from the beginning, Bruce. You built a lay figure to cherish, and called it 'Mummy darling,' and expected it to quack and be good and sit quiet. Well, it isn't, and I won't. I've got excellent health, thank God, and a fine digestion, and a brain of my own, and it provokes me to a frenzy to be cherished. Why the devil you supposed I'd give up my independence and all my plans and land everyone in the soup, just because you chose to come prancing home—"

"You seem to have landed them very adequately in the soup, without my assistance!" Bruce pointed his sarcasm by a look at the labels adorning the chairs, the glass-doored cupboards, the couch and piano. . . .

"Oh, I'll attend to that," airily. "It's nothing to some of my ups and downs in the past. If you knew—however. . . . I'll spare you that, just now. You're looking battered. On the whole," beaming at him, "I've been remarkably lucky in my career."

"Your career is over now," said Bruce grimly, "if you mean by that, your career as the proprietress of the Pension Bella Vittoria."

"Not a bit of it. It's just beginning. You'd better go back to England and settle down there, if the spectacle of my career upsets you. Yes, now I come to think of it, you're better in England. You haven't the proper speculating temperament, or I'd have let you finance my scheme to develop Monte Vittorio into a second Monte Carlo!"

Bruce let go and thundered "*Develop!* And it's never struck you, has it, in your abominable callous selfishness, that you've simply done me in with the one girl in the whole blessed world, whom I l-l-love and adore." He stumbled a little over his declaration, even though only Mrs. Wickham was the recipient. "Do you suppose that Audrey Carlyle will have anything to do with me, after she's seen you make a fool of yourself here, and herself a visitor in my mother's boarding-house with the brokers in for an unpaid bill—Everything that's hateful and shoddy . . . coarse and vulgar . . . she thought you so—so different. Dainty and motherly—oh, a gen-

tlewoman! I was proud of you. But now your name brawled all over the place—and you calmly suggesting that it shall go on indefinitely—a perpetual menace. How can I ever ask Audrey—”

“You needn’t,” and Audrey herself came towards him from behind a portière which overhung a door usually locked, leading towards one of the ground-floor bedrooms. “See what a lot I’ve saved you, Bruce, by just listening—though I couldn’t very well help myself, once you began to shout. Bruce . . .” and there was no need to say more; no doubt, for him, as to the promise and meaning of the tender depth in her eyes, the hot colour in her lips. “And as for your mother, why Bruce, you idiot, you—you man, you ought to be proud of her! I’ve never, never, never admired anyone as much in all my life as I’ve been admiring her all this evening.”

.
Mrs. Wickham was left undisturbed, unchecked, even, save for Jelf, to “develop” Monte Vittorio into a resort, and with a thousand pounds to start her on, after all outstanding debts were paid. The financing was Audrey’s doing; her mischievous appreciation of her mother-in-law as a sporting buccaneer, and a vitally entertaining old rogue, knew no bounds. She also had the tact to remove Bruce’s permanent home from Monte Vittorio to Market St. Dunstan in Buckinghamshire: “Your mother will visit us often, darling—but we’re happier in England, you know, and she—she must be given space for her talents.”

Bruce disapproved. But after the startling revelation of Audrey’s delight in Mrs. Wickham, on top of his own

shock at the loss of a dear old mother, he became a little unsettled in his views and opinions. "Not the man I was," he said with a sigh.

"But an almost bearable one, now," sweetly, from his wife, who adored him.

A LAST glimpse at Mrs. Wickham, as in our first acquaintance with her, reading a letter:

. . . *"And I think you'll find, when you come, that he's not so horribly stalwart as he used to be; perfectly healthy, of course; but he was capable of being genuinely pleased to hear of the success of your new Casino, and so was I—though I knew you'd be bound to make things hum. I wish I had your initiative and enterprise. And, talking of enterprise, my dear, I never told Bruce—nor you either, by the way!—that I knew who was the agent who let me Palazzo Castiglione. I thought it better not—don't you? He might not understand. . . ."*

SANCTUARY

SANCTUARY

WHEN Mrs. Fabian's Will was read, everybody exclaimed: "How kind! What a wonderful thought! Nobody without superhuman imagination could have realised just what such a bequest would mean to those two poor souls who are getting old!" And Mrs. Fabian's children, grown-up and married now, with children of their own, were not in the least vexed, either, that their mother should have left this one cottage away from them, together with a small sum, roughly, two hundred pounds a year, to be dedicated to the upkeep of "Sanctuary."

This furnished cottage, her own property in South Cornwall, but very rarely visited, had originally been named "Trevascon"; but she had desired, so the Will said, that it should now be called "Sanctuary." . . . "Mother was a poet, in her way," her three daughters agreed, with tears in their eyes. "She had the sweetest ideas, and she loved names that *meant* something!" They had forgotten their own sufferings under the names of Charity, Allegra, and Dawn; for these had easily been washed over by a thick coating of nick-names: Crumpet, Muffin and Bun.

"Sanctuary! . . . won't Nanny and Spiddles be too marvellously thrilled, when they hear!"

But what Mrs. Fabian had forgotten, or perhaps she had never quite realised it, for all the richness of imagination with which a mourning world now credited her, was the ancient feud that exists between every Nanny and every governess. The feud had not displayed its more uncomfortable angles in Mrs. Fabian's own house, where there were plenty of rooms in which grievances could expand and slowly pass into thin air and dissolve. And then, too, Nanny was a darling, and had a sense of humour, and pitied the thin governess so much that she left unchallenged certain questions of her nursery rights, even when molested. Yet it was mainly by lucky accident that the nursery department and the school-room department had not visibly clashed; because Charity and Allegra were twins, and Dawn was not born until six years later, just in time to keep Nanny occupied afresh, when her sisters would naturally be put more or less into the charge of Miss Priestley.

Some moments of antagonism there had been; some trembling sense of injury; some authority tactlessly wielded at the wrong moment, when Dawn, at the age of five—Dawn, the youngest, and therefore Nanny's favorite—began to grow restless of the nursery atmosphere: rocking-chair, and high fire-guard, and the Hood family, Robin and Little-Red-Riding, on the wallpaper; and tried to run away to her sisters, and to Spiddles. Spiddles was a corruption of Spider, because that lady remained so persistently meagre in spite of all the good rich food at dear Mrs. Fabian's table.

Mrs. Fabian dealt with the Nanny-versus-governess situation, not at once, because she failed to see it at

once, but a few months afterwards; when regretfully she dismissed Nanny, sent Charity and Allegra to school, and allowed Dawn to pass a year or two before it had been strictly necessary into the charge of Miss Priestley. Three years later, regretfully dismissing also Miss Priestley, she sent Dawn to school, too.

Of course she saw to it that both her faithful dependents found good situations elsewhere; she did not heartlessly lose sight of them. They had been so long with her, and were so fond of the children. A steady blossoming of presents and cards took place at Christmas and Easter, and for the children's birthdays; in fact, Spiddles' birthday was a date which Allegra found it impossible to forget, even twenty-five years later.

Mrs. Fabian, who had so much misty good-will, often wondered very sadly, for riches had not made her selfish, what Nanny and Spiddles would do when they grew too old and too tired to work? They had not been able to save very much. That class—thus she levelled them in her mind—that class always had loafing relations who did not work, sponging on them. She could not bear to think of either of the twain lacking the serene old age they deserved. And so, gradually, out of her pity and tenderness, she evolved Sanctuary.

Miss Priestley was fifty-one when Mrs. Fabian died. Nanny, who was also—but it sounded so odd!—Mrs. Bryant, was fifty-six. They were both very weary of toil. The news of their legacy was in each case a golden surprise, a blessing, a dream realised. Margaret Priestley at once gave her employers notice, proudly fore-

went her month's wages, and departed, trembling with excitement, for South Cornwall. But Nanny could not leave Masters Christopher and Michael all in a scramble, whatever her own impatience, because it would have been difficult for Mrs. Barry to find another nurse in such a hurry like. And Masters Christopher and Michael, especially Master Michael, bless his pretty ways, did cling to her so. And anyhow, you had to do as you would be done by. . . .

So it was a full six weeks after Miss Priestley that Nanny arrived, to take possession of her lordly inheritance

She did wish, of course—who could help it?—that it might have been hers alone. But there!

"I could not help wishing," Margaret Priestley had confessed, when the vicar's wife called, and remained to tea, "I could not help wishing that dear Mrs. Fabian, in so very very kindly leaving me this establishment, had left it to me alone. You will understand, Mrs. Mitchell, I am sure, and not accuse me of ingratitude or false pride, but I cannot help foreseeing that to reside with Nanny, as we used to call her, a dear, good-natured creature, but with very little education, may prove a little . . . difficult."

"You must use a lot of tact," suggested the vicar's wife brightly. "Tact, you know! We should spread it like healing ointment."

So Margaret Priestley, mentally supplied with several boxes of the healing ointment in question, stood in the doorway of Sanctuary to receive a very excited Nanny; and to indicate which of the two big bedrooms would

be hers—("Not *quite* such a lovely view, certainly, but more cupboards. And that class do so strangely over-emphasise cupboards!")

Miss Priestley supervised the disposal of Nanny's voluminous luggage, which included a sewing-machine and a rocking-chair, and several bulging wicker baskets, as well as a couple of tin trunks; and then presided graciously over the tea-table.

It struck Nanny, blowing on her tea to cool it, and longing for a firm big table on which to rest her plate of threadbare bread and butter, so that she could more heartily spread the jam, it struck her that the governess had gained rather an unfair advantage over her by arriving so long beforehand. "She can't have shown much consideration to them she worked for," reflected Nanny. And she noticed that Miss Priestley was treating her as a guest, just as though this were not Nanny's cottage, too; just as though Nanny had not as much right here. She looked round the sitting-room with disfavour. It was littered with faded elegancies of Miss Priestley's own taste and period. Nanny suggested that either she would buy a large, sturdy, sensible table, round or square, as Miss Priestley preferred, to stand in the centre of the room, that they could eat their meals off of, in comfort; or else, perhaps, as a general rule, Miss Priestley might prefer their meals in the kitchen? "Which I must say is convenient," added Nanny, "because then one can go to and fro to the oven, and everything keeping hot all the time, and no doors between!" But then she stopped short in her cosy anticipations, surprised; for Miss Priestley was looking almost ill, you might say;

besides quirking her little finger a good deal, as she held her cup half-way to her lip.

"Meals in the kitchen? *Our* meals in the kitchen? Oh, but that's really impossible, Mrs. Bryant, with the servant there all the time."

It was now Nanny's turn to be amazed. "Servant? Why, what do we want with a servant?"

"You must have seen Bella; she helped the cabman with your luggage."

"I supposed you had a young girl in, temporary-like, till I came, you being rather helpless," said Nanny, hoping that her kindly contempt for the helpless had not oozed through her speech too conspicuously. "But there's the two of us now, so we can do for ourselves nicely. People would laugh at us for foolishness if we went and kept a servant, and getting all stuck up, what with having a bit of property left us!"

"*You* may do as you please,"—Miss Priestley's little finger was quirking ever higher, and her hand was trembling—"but, of course, *I* intend to keep a servant at Sanctuary. Dear Mrs. Fabian meant me to rest, now that I am getting older, and have time for my reading and my embroidery and my water-colours. And besides, how could one manage without a servant, when one has visitors? We have no intention of burying ourselves. Mrs. Mitchell, the vicar's wife, has called two or three times already. Bella is just beginning to learn my ways nicely. We can quite well afford her wages."

"'Tisn't the affording," came swiftly from Nanny; "it's that I don't like being made ridiculous."

Miss Priestley laughed tolerantly. "My *dear* Mrs.

Bryant, pray why should it make us ridiculous to keep a servant? It's surely quite a usual custom in this country!"

"But," from Nanny, trying to put the matter on a more homely footing, "but we have both been in service ourselves."

. . . And she laughed, to accompany the awaited laugh from Miss Priestley; hoping that thus the atmosphere might be broken into geniality and a warm understanding. Cheerful gossip about the past was what she wanted, now: Mrs. So-and-So, and Mrs. This-and-That, and a final flop into her favourite subject of all, which was the Royal Family. Nevertheless, in spite of her laugh, her heart was beating fast under its plentiful padding of clothes and bosom. This first hour in the cottage of dreams, the home which had been so suddenly and so blessedly given her, after all those long years in other people's homes, was proving, after all, not quite the mellow hour of perfect happiness that had shimmered in front of her in a haze of gold, ever since the news came about the Will. Perhaps in a week or two they would shake down together all right, she and the governess; and learn each other's ways; but now: "I could cry," thought Nanny, winking her bright blue eyes very fast, as forlornly she tried to dispel a contrasting vision of the Denbigh nursery, with Master Chris and Master Micky sitting on the floor, throwing trains at each other, and she herself bringing in the familiar brown teapot which she set down with a whack on the table. Warm drifts of memory. . . . The recurring thrill of Master Michael holding his breath, and a

periodical dash across the nursery to the bathroom cold-water tap, carrying him, blue and stiff under her arm. How pleasant, in a way, it had been! . . . "I was better off there!" Nanny could not help thinking it, though she choked down the treachery.

All this while, Margaret Priestley had said not a word. She was too offended. She continued to be offended, off and on, for several days; she trailed about Sanctuary like a symbolic incarnation of A Lady Offended. Now and then, indeed, she conversed with Nanny; neither chatted nor gossiped, but conversed; and always she contrived to bring in the phrase: "Where I was engaged in the capacity of" or "In my position at" into her refined reminiscences. Let Nanny dare again to link them by the common phrase: "We were in service!" In service, indeed! She, Margaret Priestley!

For both of them, the glamour of Sanctuary had departed. . . .

AFTER a few days, Nanny's slight depression wore off, and she recovered her usual poise. Not that she would ever have called it that; her usual good-humour, then; her philosophy; her endless zest and curiosity for life, combined with that robust obtuseness as regards the feelings of Miss Priestley, which allowed her to rock and stump about the house like a cheerful elephant, upsetting all the neat arrangements which had reigned hitherto; "upsetting" Bella, the servant, by appearing in the kitchen as often as in the sitting-room; and ordering Bella about with the pleasant mellow authority of a mother or an aunt; not with the downward slant of

authority from above, which Miss Priestley had so carefully established. Bella adored Nanny; they had so many jokes together, and Nanny knew such a lot. For instance, just how the Queen of Norway was related to the ex-Emperor of Germany and the ex-Czar of Russia, and to our own late Queen Victoria, and where the Mountbattens and Leopold King of the Belgians came in. . . . "King of the Belgians that *was*," Nanny corrected her firmly. Nanny was an encyclopædia in this romantic but intricate lore. She could make it throb with vitality, and glow with colour.

"And then," so Bella told her people in the village, when she went home every evening, "Mrs. Bryant she'm got such taste; t'parlour be quite a different place now, along o' her an' her beautiful things." Indeed, Nanny's old rocking-chair and Nanny's sewing-machine and Nanny's voluminous work-basket had been ruthlessly dumped down by Nanny in the drawing-room; and Nanny's vases and ornaments and two big shells were on the mantelpiece, bulking large among the pretty trifles of Indian silver filigree and so on that Miss Priestley had collected and set forth; and Nanny's photographs, on the walls: wedding-groups in their plush frames, but mostly photographs of children, plump, cross, round-eyed children. Nanny's treasured oleograph of the Coronation of King Edward and Queen Alexandra, above the mantelpiece, boldly stamped Miss Priestley's Alma-Tademas as insipid. By this time you could not call the drawing-room even a sitting-room; it had become a parlour, as Bella so rightly termed it. There had been very little conflict,

really. Miss Priestley's possessions had been in occupation first, and that was their only strength; now they surrendered and died with hardly a struggle.

Not that Nanny was inconsiderate. She never was that. The governess was given her way, often and often. "She indulges me," thought Margaret Priestley with a sudden bitter flash of intuition. For two pins, Nanny would have mothered her.

But they never quarrelled. Whatever was, smouldered below the surface; and all the smouldering was on one side, and all the irritation. Margaret Priestley remained polite; and she tried, too, to be fair. "It is her house as much as mine," she silently argued; but the argument had very little strength against a secret conviction that dear Mrs. Fabian had spiritually bequeathed Sanctuary to Margaret Priestley, with a sort of footnote to the effect that Nanny was to be allowed to live there too, because Nanny was getting old and tired, and her legs needed rest from the stairs, as her ears needed rest from the fretful crying of other people's babies. "I must remember," Miss Priestley reminded herself, for there was a streak of submerged sweetness in her, though it ran through narrow channels and did not overflow in bounty, "I must remember that class and education are not everything, and that Nanny is a most worthy woman, most worthy. I wonder if she would be hurt if I asked her to go out on the day that the Carterets come to lunch?"

Miss Priestley's nobler nature conquered. She did not ask Nanny to go out on the day that the Carterets came to lunch; and in this she showed true courage, for this

was a triumphant occasion in a life that had been almost wholly lacking in purple. The Carterets were Miss Priestley's Best Family. She had been governess at the Carterets' for six years after she had left dear Mrs. Fabian. The Carterets were not as rich as the Fabians, but they were people of distinction in the county. The family met with vast respect wherever it went, but nowhere with such vast respect as from Miss Priestley, whose creed it was to revere family, and whose weakness it was to impress it with a sense of her own belonging. Now, the Carterets had taken a house for the summer near Falmouth, not so very far from the village where Sanctuary stood. Miss Priestley had lost touch with them; and then had written again, telling of her fortunate inheritance; so they had promised to motor over to lunch one day, and inspect the new domain whereof they supposed her sole mistress.

She looked forward to being hostess, where she had previously been governess. Hostess for the first time in her life. Sitting at her own table. . . . "A few more peas, Mrs. Carteret? I always think there's no flavour like the early peas before they are allowed to become too big. Bella, hand the peas to Mrs. Carteret."

If only, if only the Carterets had come to Falmouth during the six weeks before Nanny came to Sanctuary!

The date was fixed. Miss Priestley could only hope and pray that the little festivity would go off well. She fluttered about her preparations. Deep in her heart was a desperate hope, a plea to heaven, almost, that Nanny of her own accord would say: "Well, as you're having company . . ."—she called it "company," not "guests"

like Miss Priestley!—"As you're having company, I'll make myself scarce for the day, and there'll be more room for your elbows at table!" with one of her jovial laughs. She was so on her companion's nerves that even the things she did not say echoed through Miss Priestley's brain, in Nanny's vernacular, jostling out her more cultured and attenuated style of expressing herself.

The plea to heaven was not answered. Nanny was pleased with the thought of having the Carterets to lunch, not because they were the Carterets, but because there was that in her which responded to feasting and banquet and the clamour of happy voices. She bustled about, putting on her best black silk dress and her brooches. Miss Priestley wondered with exasperation how it was that Nanny always looked bunched-up and voluminous, whatever she wore. An amplitude that had been sanctuary for so many babies. . . .

About half an hour before the Carterets were due to arrive, another and unexpected visitor swaggered in at the little gate, and was received by Nanny with jubilant crows and cries of amazement. It was Harry, her nephew, the eldest of her brother's tribe of eight, and her favourite. Harry, who was in the army, had been stationed in India, and his aunt had not known he was coming home on leave; Private Harry Bowles of the York and Lancs.; a boisterous young man, very pleased with himself, very pleased with his aunt, to whom he was devoted, very pleased with his surprise visit; a young man of pronounced opinions and no culture at all.

"But what are we to *do*?" cried Miss Priestley,

aghast at the situation. Private Harry Bowles was at that moment in the kitchen opening a bottle of stout, and, incidentally, kissing Bella; but obviously he could not be kept there. Indeed, he possessed the same unfortunate gift as Nanny of allowing his exuberance to overflow, and fill the house, and fill Cornwall, and fill the world. "What are we to do?" cried Miss Priestley again, piteously clasping and unclasping her hands. "It's too late to put them off, now. They'll be here any minute!"

Nanny could not see that there was anything to trouble about.

"There's plenty of food; plenty of room, too, with a bit of squeezing!" And when there was company, one more, and especially such a one as her Harry, could not but add to the gaiety! There was no harm in Harry. Miss Priestley need not be afraid.

"I know what you are thinking of," said Nanny, reassuring her distracted housemate. "You've been hearing tales of barracks and such-like being a bit . . . broad. But Harry can behave himself as well as any of us. He's a good lad, and he'd no more spoil a party . . ."

But Miss Priestley could respond only with a faint moan of pain. How could Nanny ever be made to understand that poor Harry was impossible, however good a fellow? Harry and his aunt . . . you simply could not put them at the same table with the Carterets; and yet she, Margaret Priestley, now had to face the prospect of doing so, with no hope of escape.

The Carterets and Harry Bowles sitting down to-

gether, on equal terms, as though there were no difference between the guests of a governess and the guests of a nurse! Into such utter catastrophe had Miss Priestley been plunged by dear Mrs. Fabian's simple act of generosity. Catastrophe, and complications of catastrophe. . . . Could she have had her climax of woes expressed to her as in Greek Drama, by strophe and antistrophe, she could have ranked for ever with Phædra, with Electra and the Trojan Women.

But there was no time for agony. Here were the Carterets in their car, pulling up at the gate of Sanctuary. Here was the proudest moment of Miss Priestley's life. But here was Nanny standing beside her, twin hostess. And here was Private Harry Bowles emerging from the kitchen into the parlour, froth on his mouth, and in his hand a tankard of stout.

Mr. Carteret and Mrs. Carteret, and Marjorie, their daughter. . . .

"May I introduce . . . Mrs. Bryant?"

The nightmare quality of this party, in Miss Priestley's eyes, was its amazing success. It was so utterly the wrong kind of success. She herself had little or no share in it. She could almost have accused the Carterets of treachery, had they not been sacred from all blame. Nanny, urged on by her nephew and by Mr. Carteret himself, drank a little more than her usual quantity of beer; and became very ripe and juicy in her reminiscences; and told nutty stories of her life as a young bride in India, the pretty young wife of Quartermaster Bryant; she had been the belle of the regiment, the toast of a succession of paternal generals, who

chucked her under the chin, and swore an oath or two, and asked her if she knew how blue her eyes were, by Gad!

It was not hard to believe these stories, told by Nanny with such innocent pride; Mr. Carteret was not slow in noticing and complimenting her on the rosy crab-apple cheeks, and the bright clear colour of her eyes, deep-set and twinkling; for experiences had given her humour as well as many wrinkles. Certainly, her mouth was not a rosebud any longer, and her hair was white where it had been gold; and as for her figure, about which colonels had made such disconcerting and flattering remarks, that no longer existed, save in too positive a sense. But undoubtedly she must have been a very lovely girl, with a frank appreciation of life and men and her own experiences, which throve well on the beer and on Mr. Carteret's wicked encouragement.

Mrs. Carteret and Marjorie likewise adored her; for they were the Best People in a sense which Miss Priestley had not quite grasped. Nanny's personality held the table, so that even Harry subsided into audience, with an occasional gallantry for Marjorie Carteret, who thought him fun, but not quite such fun as his aunt, who was simply, Marjorie thought, an old darling; and as much a darling now as when she had worn the sprigged muslin and hat with rosebuds, at the garden-party in Simla! Miss Priestley completely failed to understand why her one-time pupil did not snub that odious, that terrible young man? She decided that the Carterets must be making mock of Nanny, making mock of Sanctuary, and of the luncheon-party. She pressed

her poor trembling hands together to force herself not to weep . . . not yet. Fortunately, nobody noticed her much. They were too well entertained by their more rollicking hostess. But they remembered to thank Miss Priestley, and to thank her sincerely, before they went off, for a very, very pleasant party. And they begged her and Mrs. Bryant to come over to Falmouth and see them quite soon—"if it wouldn't overtire you," added Mrs. Carteret, kindly. "You are looking pale and peaked, my dear; and I hoped to find you so much rested!"

They drove off in a voluble clamour of good-byes, invitations, and warm thanks. Nanny turned approvingly to Miss Priestley:

"Now, that's just the sort of come-together I *do* enjoy. Everyone friendly, and no one stiff, and all having a good time, as you might say."

Margaret Priestley shrank from rows; she was timid, hating loud voices, and anger, and raw facts like slabs of meat that get flung about when people lose control. "Dignity and courtesy," she used to say to her charges, "dignity and courtesy. If you take these qualities to walk on either side of you, you cannot stumble." But her nerves grew frayed as the edge of a worn string, during the weeks that followed the Carterets' visit.

And Nanny, too, was unhappy, lacking the affection which to her was worth all the dignity and courtesy in the world. Sanctuary seemed very small for the two of them; and it was difficult to find subjects to talk about; so that they were both mightily pleased when a letter came from Miss Allegra-that-was . . . well, Miss

Muffin-that-was . . . proposing to send down to them for a month's rest and convalescence, her eldest little girl, Jill, aged seven. Jill had been ill; and Miss Dane, her indefatigable Dorcas nurse, badly needed a holiday herself; and Allegra and her husband had to go abroad; and anyhow she knew that Jill would be perfectly safe and happy with *darling* old Nanny and *dear* old Spid-dles!

From the first second of Jill's self-possessed entrance into the house, rivalry sprang up in fiercest flame. Both the nurse and the governess hotly desired Jill to go back to her mother, Miss-Muffin-that-was, and say: "Oh, Mummy, it was lovely! And they were both angels, but of course I loved—Nanny—Miss Priestley—by far the best!" This vying for Jill's favour was something tangible to do, after those barren, futile weeks of thinking and never saying, conversing and never talking. And besides, Nanny had badly missed her usual handful of obstreperous children; and Miss Priestley wanted to exemplify all over again what a wise and wonderful way she had with the little ones. She hoped that Jill would be like Allegra, who had been a nice, intelligent child, and not too much of a tomboy. Nanny hoped that Jill would be like her Auntie Dawn, Miss-Bun-that-was, who, she testified, had been a "regular little bunch of trouble, bless her sweet face and her pretty ways. And clever? Very! Pretty? Very!! Loving? *Very!!!*"

Jill, on sight, looked very like Miss-Bun-that-was; but in all other ways this modern child proved a puzzle and a bewilderment to the two elderly women who were so anxious to keep her amused and happy. Her code

was different from what they were used to; her pleasures were different. She was not exactly precocious, nor grown-up for her years; she was simply a different sort of child, moved in a different dimension. She was not homesick; neither did she cry for her own nurse, though Nanny would dearly have loved to mop up her tears, rock her to and fro with many a "There, there! . . . Come, my blessing, and tell your old Nanny all about it."

Miss Priestley said brightly, on the first morning:

"Now we must divide up our day, mustn't we? I know of a lovely plan. We'll pretend that every hour has a fairy with wings, and every fairy rules over her own hour. There'll be a work fairy, a play fairy, an exercise fairy, a bath-and-bedtime fairy, and a fairy to preside over each meal. And of course they won't allow any rebellion in their own little kingdom. I'm quite sure that the nicest fairy of all is the one that rules the Hour-for-Helping-Others. We'll do that, won't we, Jill, and begin at once?"

Jill was standing with her slim legs rather wide apart, her hands locked behind her. She stared at Miss Priestley, in a disconcerting curiosity that was half-perplexed, half-innocent; not a rude stare, but certainly it did not hold the faintest element of awe in the presence of the governess.

"We'll do that, won't we, Jill?" repeated Miss Priestley.

"Why?" asked Jill.

Nanny cosseted her too much. Jill did not repel cossetting; she merely accepted it. She chatted quite freely

with the two old things with whom she mysteriously found herself lodged for a month; they gathered that her chief interest was tennis, and that she was being coached to play "properly," not just with a silly doll's racket. Her own racket was the right weight for her age. She was learning early to do the strokes that might lead her to be a second Betty Nuthall. Betty Nuthall, indeed, was her heroine; in vain for Nanny to gossip about the children of the Royal Family during the past thirty or forty years, while Jill was only eager to hear anecdotes of Suzanne Lenglen and Kitty McKane, Elizabeth Ryan, and Joan Fry. She had a bicycle, too; and her own little set of golf-clubs, and practised patiently with these in the garden of Sanctuary, a serious frown drawing together her pretty eyebrows. She was certainly an attractive child, though Nanny wished she had long curls that could be brushed round and round a finger, instead of such a smooth dark head.

Miss Dane, her trained nurse, Jill quite inexplicably called by her initials: E.D.; and Miss Priestley, very scrupulous over etiquette, could not quite make out whether this were done in love or contempt. "E.D.," from what Jill told them, emerged as a very different figure from Nanny; not homely, rosy, and comfortable, but as rather a crisp, intelligent, and exceedingly hygienic personality whom Jill respected, and yet treated as an equal; and yet again, whose severity the child found bracing, instead of being crushed to the ground by it. The things they did talk about! Up went Miss Priestley's brows, and up went Nanny's hands in even less restrained horror. . . . *Well!* And yet, with it all,

Jill was a dear child, a nice child, and very little trouble at all. She throve on the good food they so zealously provided for her; never forgot to do her Swedish exercises in the morning; and often went shouting about the cottage and sliding down the banisters, like any other child in the world.

Gradually, for Nanny and Miss Priestley, all secret heartburnings, all expression of their buried tumult of disagreement, their feeling of being packed too tightly together, unable to escape from each other, all their bewilderment at what had seemed like a dream and proved to be a nightmare, all their craving to be appreciated one above the other, to be set first and foremost in someone's heart, all this had finally concentrated into one shrill point of fire: Jill's preference. Older still than their recent conflict at Sanctuary, quivered that eternal feud between nurse and governess; half a class apart, instead of a whole clear and unmistakable class. Subtle strife and competition between nursery and schoolroom, babies of the nursery and children of the schoolroom, but still babies to Nanny. The governess who eats with the family, and the Nanny who eats with the servants. Authority overlapping authority. "Begging your pardon, but I don't never allow—" "Oh, but excuse me, indeed I must insist . . ."

All the old antagonism, rising . . . dangerously rising. . . . And at last symbolised between this one Miss Priestley and this one Nanny, in the parlour of Sanctuary, on the day that Jill was to leave them.

Out it all came and over that absurd, that trifling question as to which of them was to give Jill her pres-

ent of the Doll-Fiddler that sat in the cupboard and wore a velvet coat.

For this toy actually belonged to Sanctuary. It might have been Mrs. Fabian's; nobody knew quite how it got there. The legatees discovered a few other inconsequent relics and ornaments, apart from the bare furniture; but none so attractive nor so useless as the old-fashioned Doll-Fiddler with the screw in his back which wound up till he ran his bow over the frayed violin-strings and tinkled out his one little airy tune. Marvellous that he had never been broken! And Jill, for once like a really old-fashioned child, had found room in her affections for the Doll-Fiddler, as well as for her racquets and golf-clubs and bicycle. Ordinary dolls she hated; but she loved Fiddler Joe, as she called him; and often Nanny or Miss Priestley, halting unperceived at the door of the room, had seen her absorbed with him.

Silently, both of them had made up their minds. They did not confide in one another their intention of giving Jill the fiddler as a parting present. Each anticipated with a warm glow the child's radiant smile at the gift, followed by her throttling embrace. . . . "You're a darling. I've loved *you*. I'll tell Mummy to let me come back. I've loved being here!"

So, more or less, they pictured the charming little scene.

Miss Dane, Jill's "E.D.," was arriving to fetch the child. At any moment she might be here.

Nanny went to the parlour cupboard. Simultaneously, so did Miss Priestley. It was clear now that neither wanted to be only a half-giver. That was unsatisfying.

Neither had been quick enough to be first. Whose fiddler was it to give? Nobody's. Anyone's. Mrs. Fabian's. Dear Mrs. Fabian. . . .

And then Miss Priestley, losing control, declared her conviction that dear Mrs. Fabian had meant her to be more the owner of the cottage than Nanny.

"She left it to us both, and no difference made," declared Nanny stoutly; yet her eyes were full of tears.

"But the difference exists. And Mrs. Fabian knew it. Naturally she expected us—"

Voices growing more clamorous. . . .

"She expected us to share and share alike."

"Dear Mrs. Fabian was an educated woman. She knew that was not possible. Naturally, with her kind heart, she wanted you to have a home, too, to rest, with no material anxieties; but it was understood that the home should be run by an educated woman, a woman like herself."

"Then why didn't she say so? Eh? It wasn't down in writing!"

Miss Priestley sighed wearily. These people who in their ignorance and obstinacy demanded to have everything in writing. These people so lacking in the finer shades!

"It was understood," she repeated, her patience stretched nearly to breaking point. "The actual property, Mrs. Bryant, half the cottage and half the money that goes with it, are yours. But in matters of—of—Let me explain that in matters of—" She could not find the right word, so she altered the phrase: "There are abstract questions of breeding. Mrs. Fabian was aware

of that. I—I have tried to be fair; but it is quite intolerable to expect me to submit to an equality of spirit which—You have upset me several times, and I have said nothing, nothing. I dislike scenes, but really, Mrs. Bryant, I have decided to give Jill this toy, and you can have nothing to say. I am sure she would be delighted if you also sent her a little present—”

“It’s time we had this out,” from Nanny, in sturdy opposition to Miss Priestley’s maddening cobwebs of half-hints and half-phrases. “I’ve never been able to settle down here as I’d have liked to, and all because you think you’re better than me. Now you’re trying to put it into my head that Mrs. Fabian thought so, too. Well, if she did, she’d never have left this cottage to both of us alike. Nurse and governess. Now, now, Miss Priestley, can’t we be friendly-like, over this? Here’s our heart’s desire, you may say. We’re neither of us young. Here’s a home. But it’s not much of a home and not much of a comfort and not much of a rest neither, seeing you trailing about and breathing hard, and lifting your eyebrows, and saying nothing to me, who’s only a poor ignorant servant! And all because I talk friendly to Bella, a good girl she is, though rough at times and a bit too free with the boys.”

“The trouble with you,” retorted Miss Priestley, shuddering at this frontal attack, “is that you have none of the finer perceptions. None whatever. Poor soul! How should you have!”

And then, from Nanny, growing very red in the face:

“Better a heart in your bosom, I should say, than any finer what-d’you-call-’ems, that only lead to hurting

people's feelings, as far as I can see. Yes, I saw you, though you may think I didn't, moving away my nice shells that you can hear the sea murmur in, which Miss Sybil gave me, and bought out of her own money, because you thought they were common and not good enough for the company at lunch that day; and as for Harry, who you thought common, too, no better lad—"

"I do not doubt his principles," Miss Priestley explained, in angry confusion. "But—yes, since you ask me—"

"—I never asked you nothing," Nanny interrupted.

"Since you ask me, he *was* . . . of coarser material than I have been used to. And I am sure that dear Mrs. Fabian would not have liked Jill, her own grandchild, to have been brought into contact with him at the same table. Fortunately, most fortunately, it did not occur."

Jill! At the mention of the name, Nanny clasped the Dolly-Fiddler once more. Whatever happened, whatever wounds were dealt, Jill loved *her*, not Miss Priestley. Jill loved old Nanny. Jill should have her fiddler.

But it must be a personal gift from Nanny herself. Otherwise it lost all significance; otherwise it could not possibly satisfy this new ache, this lust to win an emotional triumph over the governess.

Miss Priestley, weeping and struggling like any primitive woman, flung herself on Nanny, and tried to tear away the doll from her grasp.

Some sort of confusion going on in the hall: knocking and the sound of banging doors. Both had been too intent on their quarrel to hear the arrival of Jill's nurse.

But now, in a sudden hush, Jill's clear voice was heard to cry, above the more grown-up greeting:

"Oh, darling E.D.! I'm so tremendously glad you've come! I've simply been *bored stiff*! Every minute of it; every second of it, truly!"

Nanny and Miss Priestley stood rigid . . . stunned. They barely heard Miss Dane's reply:

"Well, but it's never reasonable to be bored, Jill. Have you packed yet? Oh, clever girl! Take me up to your room now, and I'll just see. . . ."

Her voice and Jill's answering patter died away on the stairs.

"I've simply been bored stiff here."

Nanny put the fiddler back in the cupboard with the glass door. Her hand was shaking. She did not look at her companion. Her crab-apple face was puckered into grim lines. She was not going to give way, even if Jill, that precious, that lovely child, whom they both adored, cared nothing for either of them. Nanny was thinking very hard. It was curious that at this crisis she was thinking with a wisdom of which poor Miss Priestley, poor, cultured, refined Miss Priestley, was perfectly incapable.

Miss Priestley's thoughts were all in a jumble. She had lost Jill; she had lost control of her temper; she had lost her illusions about her own powers of dignity and courtesy. She had actually called Nanny's nephew "coarse," she who had ever been so exquisitely scrupulous not to wound anyone's feelings!

"How could I? How *could* I? . . ." Miss Priestley wept.

Then Nanny spoke, very gently:

"It's not going to be any good," she said, "going on like this. No good for either of us. People that can't get on must get out, one or the other. You can't rub along together without love. I've known it for some weeks now. My poor mistress, Mrs. Fabian, she meant well by us. But she wasn't very clever." Miss Priestley was conscious of amazement at hearing Nanny, ignorant old Nanny, come to this surprising conclusion! "—So, not being very clever, she just dumped us down here, you and me, Miss Priestley, and left the rest to the Lord. Well, I've never had any children of my own," Nanny went on, irrelevantly, "though God knows I've ached for them and no trouble too much, even when it's other people's children, bless their dear little faces and their pretty ways! Even though Master Micky would hold his breath, a dangerous habit, but the doctor said it wouldn't matter, and he's growing out of it now. But that's my job, and I'll go back to it. I'm fitter for it than you, though older."

Margaret Priestley, not all selfishness, made a choked sound of protest.

"Now, don't you fret, my dear; but just sit here and be comfortable, and get a friend of your own class to live along with you, and I'll put it right with Miss Crumpet and Miss Muffin—Mrs. Lester, that's to say. But I've got to love children, though they're not mine, and though when they're old enough for governess and school, I've to pack up my things and begin all over again. Yet there's plenty of babies, and some families are still glad to get a good old-fashioned style of nurse

that's kind and careful and can be trusted, even without new-fangled exercises every morning. I'll be glad in a way. Resting doesn't suit me, and I'm strong still, except at times when I feel it's going to rain in my bones, and then there's often a nurserymaid to do the stairs. So I'll just be looking round again, and no ill-feeling, Miss Priestley, for I've loved Miss Bun the same as Miss Jill and Masters Micky and Christopher, and there were others, too, and plenty to come, I hope. It isn't nature for them to go on loving me back, the same way. . . ."

GEMINI

GEMINI

LOOK here . . . what *has* become of David Merriman?"

They had asked this so often; but just to-night it seemed a good thing to go and find out. For they missed Merriman. They missed his vitality and his good-humour, and his preposterous habit of rushing away on bye-issues, whatever subject was in discussion, like a river in full spate, and having to be dammed and dammed for it!

Up till six weeks ago, Merriman was accessible whenever they wanted him, any or all of them; but lately, queer rumours were about; for he had not disappeared, after the fashion of Waring and other mysterious victims of the Wanderlust—

*"What's become of Waring
Since he gave us all the slip?" . . .*

—Corporeally, he was still present in London, in his rooms; except for one month when he had impulsively quitted them without leaving a clue as to his whereabouts. It was socially that he had given his comrades the slip. And then, these puzzling reports: "They say he's chucked his job on the *Gazette*. They say he's turned analytical chemist . . . something of that sort; they say he's hunting for the elixir of youth—as though Var-daroff hadn't already obligingly found it for us; they

say he potters about all day and most of the night in his dressing-gown, with a jungle of beard on his face, pouring things out of bottles; they say he smashes the bottles and that his rooms are a heap of broken glass; they say he won't see anyone, that he's looking. . . . Oh they say, they say, and they say. . . ."

"Come on. I'm sick of this. Let's go and rout him out; make him dress and shave and spend the evening with us, like a human being."

So Prentice fetched his car from the garage, and they went off in search of David Merriman.

His three friends were anxious about him, in spite of their assumption that all they missed was his rollicking good company. The fourth man did not care. He was a new acquaintance brought in casually that night by Johnny Carfax; younger than the others, better dressed and better looking; a handsome youngster with an air of secret adventure, and not too scrupulous adventure at that!—You could imagine his wearing a coat slung round his shoulders without putting his arms into the sleeves—that type of man! A man of easy conquest. He seemed amused at all this fuss about David Merriman. A sneer hung on his lips:

"If the poor beggar wants to be left alone to smash medicine bottles. . . ." For he was reluctant to be hauled out of Prentice's comfortable chambers, having once been brought there. It was a blowy night, and the whisky was good, and what did Merriman matter, anyway?

"Why not ring up?" he suggested, lazily.

But the others took no notice. He was the youngest,

and a stranger—a rather impudent stranger—and they did not want strangers; they wanted Merriman back again. Johnny Carfax wondered why he had bothered at all with young Theo Strake?

What *was* the matter with David?

His rooms were in the City; a deserted city that night; all the empty streets were full of wind, instead of the usual hustle and crowd. Merriman's rooms were at the top of the house. They banged and banged at the door, and nobody answered. Then suddenly came a crash—and a sombre trickle under the door. It was too melodramatic to be true; and Theo Strake laughed at the white faces of his companions.

"*That's* not blood," he said, in scoffing reassurance. "I've seen a lot of blood. Smell it if you doubt me. It's—yes, vermouth; Cinzano."

. . . But Prentice had lost his head, and was pounding at the panels of the door as though he hoped to smash them. Then suddenly the door flew open, and there stood Merriman, looking like a conventional illustration of the weird stories they had heard about him; looking like Lucifer fallen from Heaven with a whack. He was unshaven, and wore his dressing-gown and slippers. But his aspect was hollow and hunted and wild, beyond these mere externals. Nor did he seem as pleased at the sight of his visitors as might have been expected from a man of such wontedly genial temperament.

"Do you want to come in?" he asked, abruptly.

"Don't be a fool, Merriman!" cried Carfax impatiently. "Do you suppose we want to stop outside and

shout through the door? If you've got something to hide, sling it in the cupboard, quick: him or her or it. We'll give you fifty seconds' grace."

Merriman shrugged his shoulders. "I've got something to find; nothing to hide."

"Missing Will?"

He grinned impishly, more like the David they were familiar with. "Missing cocktail . . ." he said. "Come in, come in! I'm not so sure that I'm sorry to see you. This room is mouldy with enigmas, and I'm sick of groping. If you wanted to get to Hungary, Johnny, how would you do it? Would you go to the station and take a ticket? Would you go by train and boat and train again? Would you? Well, that's just what I can't do, you see. Oh, the splendid insolent simplicity of going to the station and taking a ticket. And here I am—stuck! I tell you, it's driving me mad!"

Mad? . . . The unswept floor of the room was piled high with bottles; so were the tables, chairs and shelves. Glasses and broken glasses were littered everywhere; and glasses half-full of pale liquids, colourless or faintly gold, dimly green, deep winking evil red. David Merriman, standing in the midst of this fantastic wreckage, this confusion of alchemy, standing there, a despairing djinn in a dressing-gown, brandishing his arms and shouting: "Open Sesame!—Blast you! Open!" to an invisible box-office that was to take him to Hungary, and left him in the City of London. . . . What did it all mean? It was quite incredible, and quite incredibly idiotic.

—"You'd better tell us about it, David," Carfax sug-

gested, gently. He and Prentice and Richardson were rather wishing that the new fellow were not looking on at this spectacle of a disintegrated Merriman.

"Look here," Richardson pointed out, for his spirit was the most laborious in the group; "Look here, you know, Merriman, if you want to go to Hungary—and it beats me why anyone should!—If you want to go. . . . Look here, why the devil don't you let Cook or Lunn or one of those fellows fix you up? I suppose you're after a woman over there?—dark and gypsyish, aren't they? Not my type. . . . But sitting about, and turning down your friends, and drinking too much, won't take you far."

Their host burst into a shout of laughter: "Won't take me far!" he cried. . . . And his arms involuntarily described a series of motions familiar to all of them: the flamboyant rhythm of cocktail shaking . . . in the air and without implements. So that Carfax shuddered at the grotesque spectacle; and he crunched a way over to the window, bits of glass snapping under his feet; there at any rate he could look out; need not watch the spectral pantomime by the ghost of a once sane and witty Merriman.

—"Won't take me *far*? But I tell you, it'll take me farther, when I succeed, *if* I succeed, then all your Cooks and your Lunnns and your wagon-lits! It'll take me as far as I want to go: As far as Heaven and Hungary. . . . And, oh, Horace, you chump, do you really suppose I'm drinking too much just for the sake of getting drunk?" Suddenly, he seemed to perceive that Carfax, whom he had always liked best of the three, was definitely un-

happy about him. "All right, Johnny, all right, all right—I'll tell you. Then you can judge. Horace won't believe a word of what I say, and it'll be good fun watching Horace not believing me—best fun I've had for weeks. I'm not sure that I believe myself. . . .

"You know, in the summer, I was rambling about Central Europe? I stuck to the smaller places; didn't go near Prague or Budapest or any of the capitals; hadn't got the clothes, for one thing. At a village in the Carpathians, St. Rudigund, the host of the pub asked me to try some home-grown Slivovtitz; not his own vintage; his father's. It was pretty old, he said. He only had a few bottles left. It was unusual stuff, not too sweet, with a haunting flavour of plum running through it. I wanted a bottle to take home with me. In fact, it was to be a little present for Horace. . . . Say thank you, Horace, even though you never got it! The old fellow made me pay such a thumping price that I decided not to give it to Horace, after all.

"When I got home—do you remember that night when I gave a dinner, and wasn't there?"

Prentice nodded. He had been one of the guests. And that had been the beginning of Merriman's oddness; the beginning of eccentric rumour. . . .

"I was going to mix the cocktails and have 'em ready, just before any of you turned up, when it struck me that I might invent a new one with a strain of Slivovitz in it. So I opened the bottle, and shook up one glassful, for myself, just to try it; it was by way of an experiment. I didn't put in more than a dash of the Slivovitz. . . .

“. . . And there I was, drinking it at a table in a cabaret in some foreign town. There were gypsies playing, the real Tzigany; and I thought at once that it might be Hungary; Budapest, probably. I recognised the sort of naked piano instrument they have, striking at the bars with two little balled sticks.

“No, *no*, it wasn't a magic carpet or any obvious dam-fool wizardry like that. I didn't fall asleep and dream, or fly through the air. I was just *there*—there and not here. It's simple enough. You believe a lot of more absurd things every day of your life, Horace, only you're used to them. You simply wouldn't *believe* the things that you believe!

“There I was, and not at all surprised. It was one of those pleasantly irresponsible cafés where you couldn't take your sister, and wouldn't if you could. Lewd and expensive and picturesque. Well patronised, too.

“Gypsy music slithers about the room like shining water; you can't gather it up, or remember it afterwards, but at the time, by God, it does make you feel a glorious beast! I told you that there were no women there, didn't I? The name of the café was Kiss Ludo. I saw it upside down over the entrance. Not a joke. Kisses are common in Hungary—Kiss Ludo; the surname first. Presently, they brought in three enormous trays with huge silver dish-covers over them; everybody applauded when the covers were whisked off—three girls lying thigh-deep in flowers! *You'd* have applauded, Horace—” But Merriman glared at Theo Strake, as though he had only just perceived that here was an intruder;

and disliked him fiercely on sight. "Yes, the usual Continental cabaret surprise. But really pretty girls. One of them—" he dropped his voice. . . . And again his hands described the mechanical motion of shaking a cocktail, as though they had done it for so long that now they acted without his volition—"One of them was lovely. She reminded me of the Kirschners we used to tack up on the walls of our huts at the beginning of the War, do you remember? Swift and young and roguish. Delectable. . . ! Fair bobbed hair, very round and shining, like a golden apple. She leaped off her tray, scattering flowers, and ran, light-footed, straight to me; yes, straight over to my table, and knelt on the chair beside me. My word, I was flattered!

"She spoke a little French, about as much as I did. Waiting till the room was full of noise and music, she murmured:

"'Take me back. I am frightened. I like you, I love you, but I am frightened.'

"'Take you back where?' I asked.

"I was thunderstruck when she answered: 'Back to school!'

"School, she said, was about thirty miles out of Budapest, on the plain. She couldn't quite explain to me—her French was too limited, or mine was!—how she came to be on the tray and under the dishcover in the Café of Kiss Ludo. It didn't seem to me a normal position for any pupil at a Young Ladies' Seminary, but I gathered that it was a joke; that she had wanted to see life; that she was bored at school; and that she had changed places with one Marishka, whose name occurred

several times in the story; that now she had had enough of the joke, and please would I take her back? 'I like you, I love you, I am frightened,'—this was her refrain. I wondered how she would have got out of her scrape if she had found no one to like or love with quite so much cherubic confidence that the liking would be returned, and the love—wouldn't. Well. . . . There's a dash of Rudolf Rassendyll in us all! I picked up the little beauty; hoisted her on to my shoulder, and staggered out with her, swaggering and shouting as though she were my legitimate prize. That being presumed, nobody stopped us. The other two girls were left behind, and those gypsies were fiddling away like mad. . . . Their music was the incoming tide, dark and flowing. . . . We splashed through, and out into the street. Two or three cars were waiting on the cobbles, and I told her to bribe any driver of them—I couldn't speak their language, and she could!—to take her out to wherever her school was. Of what I should say to the headmistress—the headmistress, mark you!—I hadn't the remotest idea. I don't know now what I would have said if there had been a headmistress; only there wasn't, as you'll see presently.

"She was still wearing her Kirschner-Girl costume, a sort of cowslip-coloured tunic of thin silk; so I wrapped her in my overcoat. We drove for nearly two hours over those mournful Hungarian plains that are velvety purple by day, decorated with tall yellow sunflowers and fat white geese. They spread like heartbreak to the horizon. . . . No end to them. Of course, this was night, and I couldn't see where we were going.

"She snuggled down into my arms, and slept. . . . It's time that somebody disproved the continental legend of the 'cold English.' . . . Damn silly legend!

"At last we drew up at some tall iron gates, obviously the entrance to quite a big garden, if not an estate.

" 'I know my way now,' said Carla. She had told me her name. And then: 'Good-bye. Thank you!' And put up her face to be kissed—the scamp!

" 'Shall I see you again?'

" 'It depends!' She was poised, ready to be off.

" 'Depends on *what*?' I was in a blue funk that I should lose her altogether . . . while I waited for her answer.

"Which, incidentally, I never got, because by then, I was back here again.

"No, I can't tell you how it happened. It's no good asking me. I just know that I didn't wake up, or tumble down the chimney, or drift in on a moonbeam. Nothing of that sort. If the magic worked by any talisman—and it didn't seem like magic; it was all much too natural—but if it had a talisman, it was the cocktail . . . because I was still tightly grabbing the empty glass.

"How long had I been away? Yes, I thought you'd ask that. I had been away for exactly the amount of time I hadn't been here—not allowing for a journey out to Hungary and back. I must have been about an hour in the café, and about an hour and three-quarters in the car; and I left at—let me see, for what time had I invited you to dinner, Prentice? Eight o'clock? And I was getting the cocktail ready at, say, a quarter to eight. It was twenty to eleven when the adventure shrank up

and ended. And here I stood, gaping, with the glass in my hand, and Carla's clear laugh still in my ears, and not a blessed idea how I could get back to her!

"It was a week before it dawned on me that the bottle of Slivovitz might have had something to do with it. So I dressed as carefully as a bridegroom—for I might be going to see Carla again at any moment! and I drank some Slivovitz, neat. You would have laughed if you had seen the way my hand trembled when I poured it out. I spilt quite a lot of it on the table. . . .

"And then, you know, I didn't budge! Nothing whatever happened! You'd have laughed still more to see me standing there expecting to be whisked off somehow into the fourth dimension in Hungary; but standing on and on at my own dining-room table!

"I racked my memory for every story of enchantment that I had ever read; and I came to the conclusion that each detail had got to be exactly the same—to make the same spell work in the same way, and to the same end. So I waited till it was a quarter to eight, and I mixed myself exactly the same cocktail—I remembered the ingredients, because I had been rather precise about them, on the first occasion; I wanted to impress Dicky Foster, who's inclined to be swollen-headed about his private recipes.

"I drank. . . .

"It was all right, this time. I was back again in Hungary. But no, not exactly the same place; but in some sort of a great hall in a castle. Indeed—because I needn't bother you with my discoveries in proper sequence!—I learnt afterwards that it was the inside in-

stead of the outside of Carla's "School." School?—The little devil! It was no more a school than this house is a school. It was her husband's country seat; and he was a count or a field-marshal—or both. At any rate, his servants saluted him.

. . . "Carla appeared, presently. She came into the hall, where I sat disconsolate, looking at the great antlered beasts on the walls, and wondering where the hell I was this time, and what was going to happen next? She came down the carved staircase, very much grande dame, very decorous, and very decorative; and told me politely how glad she was to welcome me, and how sorry that her husband was away hunting.

"It was an unsatisfactory evening, on the whole. For she remained chilly; not in the least like the gamine whom I had seen carried on a tray in a heap of roses. She was so frigid that I hardly dared remind her of that escapade; nor ask her why she had played the trick on me, of pretending that she was still a schoolgirl when she was a wife? But at last, I did call up enough courage. She frowned at first, bewildered and angry. Then a gleam of light broke through—a very pale gleam.

"That must have been my wicked little sister, Carla. My twin sister. I am Zena, not Carla. We are so alike that it is difficult to tell us apart."

"Is she," I enquired, my heart thumping, 'is she in the castle now?'

"Yes, she lives with me. I would like to have left her longer at school, but they would not have her. She is too naughty and wild. So we are going to marry her quickly to a friend of my husband's."

"After that, she wouldn't speak of Carla any more. I paid her compliments in stilted French. But Zena, who was, more formally, the Countess Janoschoza, didn't like me; or, if she did, she was too virtuous to show it. So she kept me in my place. . . . I might have been a vassal; they are feudal, those Hungarians! I was given refreshments; shown pictures. And still I sat there, longing and longing for Carla to come in. I didn't see Carla that time. . . .

"How in God's name did they account for me? I couldn't account for myself, certainly. But all the people I met took me for granted.

"Back I came, to these rooms of mine. Ten o'clock was striking. Forty minutes less than my last allowance of Paradise. The cocktail might have been slightly smaller.

"You can imagine, can't you, how I spent my time after that. I dared not keep on going back and back. Suppose I used up all my time, and that precious bottle of Slivovitz, on long sedate, amiable conversations with the Countess Zena, who was so like my wicked little love, Carla? So pretty, and so strikingly alike, but in behaviour how different!

"But I did see Carla again, on my fifth visit to the castle. By then, I was getting desperate. On my fifth visit, I saw Carla, and not Zena. Carla was as provocative and as impetuous as ever—and as fond of me. She only laughed when I demanded, with as much fierceness as I could command, how she had dared make me her buffoon on our last encounter?

" 'It was fun!' she cried.

“In my between-times here in London, in these rooms—for they only counted as between-times now; my new life, the life that mattered, was away on that fantastic bit of existence that had got loose and was floating about!—but in my between-times, I was trying to learn Hungarian, so that I could reach a more enlightened understanding with the twin sisters, than by paying compliments to Zena, or kissing Carla. Have you ever tried to learn Hungarian, any of you? It’s worse than Chinese. Somehow, when it came to the point, however much I swotted, I could never remember any more than *hideg* and *meleg*, hot and cold. ‘Hot’ meant Carla, and ‘cold’ was Zena, and I got no forrarder, and the Slivovitz was sinking in its bottle. Not a wine-merchant in London had ever heard of the stuff, leave alone supply it. I consoled myself by planning that, of course, the minute I had finished it, I could go out to Hungary properly, in a decent normal fashion, and stay there as long as I liked. It would be easy enough to find out the café in Budapest where I had begun my adventures, and easy enough to discover the castle of Count Janoschoza. Nevertheless, I was beginning to get worried—lots of things were worrying me . . . I never saw the twins together; that was odd. And then, neither of the sisters seemed curious about my spasmodic comings and goings; and I couldn’t explain them; the whole affair was so incredible, and none of us knew enough French; and I wasn’t there long enough; and I wanted Carla with me always. I had a horrible notion that Carla might equally have said, to whatever strange man had shot in on a cocktail, so to speak: ‘I like you, I love you, I am fright-

ened!’ Supposing I lost the trick of re-entrance! Supposing the power went to somebody else; somebody better-looking, more—more dashing, than myself? And at the mere idea of such a rival. . . .

“Oh, well, it’s no good raving!

“My paper gave me the chuck at about that time. They said I was growing too absent-minded. That was literally the matter with me—absent-minded! Soul and mind and heart were absent, and only my reluctant body dragging about here in London.

“When I made my cocktail with the last of the Slivovitz—a bigger dose than usual!—I reckoned it would carry me over to the fourth dimension or wherever it was, for about four hours. I had quite decided that this time I would contrive to make a definite appointment with Carla, only coming into Hungary the right way round, the real way.

“But I forgot!

“You’ll hardly credit that. But if you’d had the same revelation . . . you’d have forgotten. It knocked everything else to blazes.

“The revelation was just this: there were no twins: Carla was Zena, and Zena was Carla; and she thought she was twins. It was her delusion.

“No wonder I had never seen them together! They had each talked so convincingly of ‘my sister’: Zena a trifle wistfully, as though regretting that little Carla was so wild and unmanageable and did such freakish things; and Carla, of Zena, rebelliously, a pout on her lips, her eyes sullen: Zena was so staid. She had married a year ago, when she was only seventeen! And Zena was so

good; she never did anything bad; she would not even betray her husband, she! . . .

"I was told about this—this gemini complex, by a charming elderly Hungarian who spoke English, and whom I met there that night, at a dinner-party to which I didn't in the least want to go, only I had been tipped into the middle of it at somewhere round the third course, so that I couldn't very well rise and walk out. But my hours were too precious to waste in this fashion, and I sat there hating my neighbour, and wondering where Carla was? Where did she always hide herself? Surely she could be present, knowing that I worshipped her! that I was crazy for her!—crazy as Tzigane music stealing at night over the plains. . . .

"Zena sat at the head of the table. She smiled at me very graciously; but I knew she didn't like me. I guessed the elderly gentleman who spoke English to be the friend of Count Janoschoza, for whom they destined Carla, because she was ripe for marriage. Ripe . . . at eighteen, Continental fashion! If only I had carried her off that first time, instead of bringing her home to her sister . . . to herself! But I had been too dazed to realise what I should have done; and now I was too helpless and hemmed in—hemmed in by that exciting duenna, a bottle of Slivovitz! What a position for a lover!

"If I could only see Carla again, and get her well started for England, by the time my spell had stopped its work—And then meet her at the other end—You see what I mean, don't you? No, of course you don't. . . . Horace looks as though he'd like to take my temperature!

"The Tokay Aszúbor—seventy years old—was put on the table with the dessert; and the ladies withdrew to the drawing-room. They were very formal, these assemblies at the castle. It was then that I dropped into conversation with the only man present who could speak English—my rival, as I rather melodramatically termed him in my mind.

"He said: 'Do you not think our hostess is very beautiful?'

"I answered, daring him: 'Yes, but not so beautiful as her sister; as her twin sister.'

"And then he told me.

. . . "I was not as surprised as you might have supposed. Subconsciously, I already had suspicions. I had never once seen them together. It had always been Carla or Zena; never Carla *and* Zena.

"Where I cursed my luck was that so often, by some whimsical irony, I met the Zena side of Carla, who was cold and virtuous and a little antagonistic; and so rarely, so very rarely, I had the good fortune to arrive just at the propitious moment to meet the Carla side of Zena. . . .

"I vowed grimly that I would wait no longer, but that the very next time Carla was uppermost—well, the Carla delusion, then; I don't care how you put it!—I would take what the cocktail gods had sent me. I needn't mind. The child had a husband, a protector. I needed to mind when I had thought of her as the little sister—the delicious urchin who looked up wide-eyed at the stranger from England, and said: 'I like you, I love you!'

"I strolled out into the garden, after dinner. That Tokay was heavy, rich and cloying. While we sipped it, the Count clapped his hands, and got his gypsy band in, to play for us. So my pulses were racing that night!

"Down by the iron gates where I had first left Carla, I met her again—on the inside, this time. She was, of course, wearing the same dress she had been wearing when she had sat as Zena at the head of her table. But I knew she was not Zena any more, for she ran straight into my arms.

. . . "At that moment, the devils dropped me back here. I don't know who they are, or what they are, or why they do it, but damn them! Damn them! The devils! They know I can't get back to her. . . . *Damn them!*

"I never saw her again. Though I went straight out to Hungary, by train and boat and train, I couldn't find the café of Kiss Ludo. There are dozens of Kisses—all up the streets of Budapest. The name is as common as Smith in England. But just this one café didn't exist. Nor, as far as I could discover, did the castle of Count Janoschoza exist; not on the normal and conscious plane, anyway. I circled Budapest at a radius of twenty and thirty and forty miles, like a hound casting. I went nearly frantic. I made enquiries everywhere.

. . . "But all that world, and all those people who dwelt in it, they couldn't be reached in the direct way. Perhaps they had no independent existence apart from an unholy cocktail.

"I wasn't going to give up Carla, though. Obviously, the next thing to be done, was to go to St. Rudigund, in the Carpathians, and get a good supply of Slivovitz

—all that I could persuade the innkeeper to let me buy. It didn't matter what it cost—if it cost every penny I owned, Carla was worth it. Not Zena, you understand, who adored her husband, but *Carla*. And our meetings had only been one in seven! If I had any sense of humour left, that would have amused me!

“At St. Rudigund, the old chap I knew had died, and his successor at the inn had drunk all the remaining Slivovitz except seven bottles. I paid a fantastic price for these, because I simply couldn't bother to hide my eagerness. Then I rushed home. I dared not risk starting off from any other place, in case it would only work using the same room, the same table, the same glass, the same shaker. Carla was waiting, and somebody else might come along—she was like a fruit near its perfect hour. . . . One tap would knock it to the ground.

“Carla! . . . If you'd heard my heart thump as I sloshed in the ingredients, careful not to waste the Slivovitz, shook up the cocktail, poured it out, and drank it . . . Carla . . . Carla. . . .

“Again, not a damn thing happened. I stopped where I was.

“After the first shock of disappointment, it struck me that the cocktail hadn't tasted quite the same. Either the quality in one of the bottles, or the proportions were different. How much gin had I put in, before? And just how much French Vermouth? I hardly used any Italian, the Slivovitz made that unnecessary. A spot of lemon; a dash of bitters. . . . Well, but a slack estimate of spots and dashes wasn't good enough. I had to remember exactly. It tasted wrong. I knew the right shade and flav-

our, as it ought to be, but this agitated tearing round Europe had shaken my memory. *How* much of the French Vermouth? How much gin? Did I jerk the Angostura twice or three times through the dropper?

"It was no good." David Merriman finished, morosely. "I've been at it ever since. No good. I've almost given up." During the latter part of his tale, he had been mechanically pouring out liquids from the bottles on the table, as though he could not stop doing it, now: as though he would have to go on mixing cocktails all his life, till perhaps accident should slant him obliquely on to the recipe he had forgotten. The men who listened to the story, noticed a dark plum-coloured bottle, square in shape, with no label on it. He poured out all that was left of it, tilting it up-side down as he did so. Then, in a sudden fury, he shook and shook and shook at the cocktail, holding the shaker high above his head, still with that hopeless rhythm of movement, as though he neither knew nor cared any more what would be the result, but was forced by some goblin Council of Ten to go on shaking cocktails for their amusement. Finally, noticing with listless amusement what he had been doing, he poured out the mixture, and nonchalantly passed the glass to Johnny Carfax.

"Try it?" he suggested; "It's the only refreshment I can offer you. It's about the hundred and seventh of a long line. I shall have to chuck it now, as there's no Slivovitz left; and Horace, bless his kind heart, can remove me quickly to a lunatic asylum."

Carfax said: "Not in my line, thanks. I don't mind a glass of sherry, but cocktails—" He shook his head,

and passed on his glass to young Strake, who was nearest.

“Good luck!” cried Theo Strake, and drank it off.

. . . They all stared at the space where he had been standing.

EMPTY TABLES

EMPTY TABLES

A COBBLED alley led straight from the Via Flora down to the sea-wall. At the two corners, the *Fortuna* and the *Rigoletto* faced each other defiantly. Ettore sat on the wall with his round, fat little back turned to the Mediterranean, and wondered which of the restaurants was the successful one. It was quite impossible that they should both be on a triumphant level, standing as they did in such obvious rivalry. Ettore had been slaving in the kitchens of large London hotels for the past four years, and this was his first evening back in Miramiglia, where he was born. He was sentimental by nature; and the thought of Lisa and her husband, happy in the *Fortuna*, bustling about among the tables, pausing sometimes to embrace, did not make him less so.

Amadéo was a conqueror; he was born lucky and handsome and self-confident. He compelled admiration wherever he went. His dancing was like an angel's—only livelier; no angel could have mastered the number of intricate steps which were as nothing to Amadéo's nimble feet. Ettore had always been very humble in the presence of this hero. It had seemed natural, even, that he should win Lisa, the prettiest girl in Miramiglia. With Lisa's dowry they had bought the *Fortuna*; and Ettore, unable to bear it, had trotted off to England,

leaving Amadéo loudly crowing prophecies of the downfall of the *Ristorante Rigoletto*.

Ettore was surprised to find the *Rigoletto* still standing, well-lit, and with an effect of stir behind the large windows facing the sea. He caught a glimpse of the proprietor, with his cone-shaped head, the faithful parrot still sitting on his shoulder, laughing and talking with a party at the table in the angle. Why had not Amadéo attended to this presumptuous fellow? Surely, for Lisa's sake, he ought not to have been allowed to flourish quite so conspicuously. The very palms in front of his door had an arrogant air. Ettore glanced uneasily back to the *Fortuna*. The two wooden puppets, lady and gentleman, still nodded in the window; it was a pretty mechanical toy, this, and very much beloved by Lisa. Ettore peered to see beyond the painted dolls. He could not discern any movement.

Suddenly he determined that he *would* go in and see Lisa. He had thought it would be painful, but if things were not going well and Lisa heard that an old friend had been sitting on the wall and had not even dropped in for an *apéritif*, she might think—He jumped down from the wall, picked up his best hat—an abomination!—and, rehearsing to himself very quickly, with an affectation of heartiness: “And how is the good Amadéo? How is the good Amadeo?” marched up the alley, and through the side door which led into the bar of the *Fortuna*.

A man was sitting quite alone, at one of the little tables. It was Amadéo himself. The table looked depressed; it had no gleaming cloth on it; the flowers in

the vase were faded, and the ash-tray was too full to be elegant. Amadéo's bow tie strove to seem jaunty in spite of circumstances, but everything else in the *Fortuna* drooped.

"Ah, the good Amadéo!" cried Ettore, according to plan. His friend, startled, threw him a look which could hardly be translated into welcome. Then he realised that the visitor was Ettore, before whom it had always given him a peculiar pleasure to swagger and strut. He jumped to his feet with a great clatter, seized him by both hands, and worked them up and down violently, with loud comments on his improved appearance, his beautiful clothing—"Quite the Signor Inglese"—and the great pleasure it gave him, Amadéo, to see so old, so valued, a companion back again in Miramiglia.

"And—and Lisa?" enquired Ettore, as usual very subdued by the display of patronage.

"Ah, Lisa! Lisa returns this evening. She has been away for six weeks, with her mother in Torino, fortunately recovered now from a dangerous illness. You can picture how I have been lonely without my Lisa; but she returns this evening."

Was Ettore mistaken, or was there a tremor of foreboding in Amadéo's full-bodied voice?

The door swung again; a customer to dine? No, only someone who wanted a gin and vermouth. Amadéo scuttled forward to serve him; he made it seem like ten cocktails. But presently the man was gone, and the bar-room was empty again, and the tables at the ristorante beyond were empty, too. Ettore gulped once or twice, and then forced out: "And the business? It prospers?"

Again Amadéo held forth. If Ettore had been in Miramiglia during the last four years, he said, he would have seen how it had prospered. Lisa's cooking and Amadéo's management were the talk of the visitors who came for the winter season. The tables were always crowded; the cellars were emptied as fast as they could be filled. "You remember Guido Zena, Ettore? Yes, he was at school with us. A fool, but willing. He was waiter to that *Rigoletto*—that little ristorante opposite—you may have noticed it," continued Amadéo, rather badly overdoing it; "but he came to me when he saw what a success I was. Rigo was furious, because Zena had understood the buying. Cheap and good, that is the way profits are made. I tell you, Ettore, not to boast, but to show you that Lisa has done well in her marriage, that she had two girls to help her in the kitchen; one of them was your cousin, Bianca. Two girls and Guido, and even then there was so much work that we thought of hiring another waiter—"

"And you, what did *you* do?"

"*I?*" with magnificent simplicity. "*I* was the padrone!"

There was silence. Ettore pursed his lips as though for whistling, but no sound came. A carriage drew up. Amadéo sprang forward: "Lisa!" But it was only a party who were going to dine opposite.

The padrone of the *Fortuna* sat down again, buried his curly head on his arms, and began to weep. He had given in. Even to Ettore he had given in.

Ettore touched his arm.

"How did it happen?" he whispered.

There was no need to ask *what* had happened; and, briefly and to the point for once in his life, Amadéo replied:

"Lisa did it all, and when she went away it stopped."

"Does she know?"

"Not yet, but she will have to know to-night. She will see—" Amadéo's shrug was expressive of all despair. "I am down, right down at the bottom. It is the end of our love as well as of the *Fortuna*."

"Oh, but surely not!" cried Ettore, comforting him. "Lisa will not care. Lisa loves you. She will help; you will get started again. You will be happy."

And then Amadéo said a most astonishing thing. He said: "I am not one of those who can live happily with a wife who does not admire me." Down at the bottom, where Amadéo said he was, these scraps of self-revelation are sometimes to be found. Ettore's round, whimsical little face was knit into puzzlement. Could it be, then, that Lisa, going away to nurse her mother, had been confident that her splendid husband would carry on the *Fortuna* in glory? Could it be that for four years she had truly imagined their prosperity due to him and not to her? But what a miracle, to be loved like that, and by a girl like Lisa! Ettore's heart contracted with sheer longing. Nobody had ever admired him at all; and Lisa, who was not usually unkind, had found his passionate moments *un buon divertimento*.

"They all go opposite to that *macaco*," Amadéo broke out savagely. "He is laughing at me, he and his parrot; they walk about among their visitors, and then they come and stand at the door and look across at my door,

and they laugh at me. At first people came here just the same, after Lisa went; and then the word was passed round: 'The cooking is no more good. The cooking is bad. It is not what it was.' And so gradually my ristorante emptied itself, and now I am ruined, and Lisa's money is all gone, and Lisa's heart will be broken. Everybody will know," continued Amadéo, piling up his sorrows into an edifice that might seem more noble in contemplation than each single pettiness. "Yes, even Lisa's mother, who has not died, and all Miramiglia, and Guido Zena, and your cousin Bianca, both dismissed by me yesterday, for there was nothing for them to do. And Rigo will know, and his cow of a French cook, and that ugly cow his daughter. And the clients who used to come to me. You, Ettore, know already. And Lisa will know to-night—" Remembering this, even the consolation of a pose was hardly worth while to the man; he dropped his arms wearily. "It is done. I am finished. At the bottom."

To Ettore, who had always lived within a short tumble from the bottom, and who was a very Pagliacci for attracting mockery and laughter, the spectacle of the lordly bully, Amadéo, thus humiliated, could not but bring a quiver of secret pleasure. After all, Ettore was human, and he had adored Lisa, who had frankly worshipped Amadéo. "One must be a philosopher," Ettore began, patting the bowed shoulder nearest him. "Reflect, for instance—"

The swing-doors opened again, admitting a surge of cheerful, well-bred voices, speaking English. Their owners numbered seven, three men and four ladies, in eve-

ning dress, with an air about them that bespoke the careless importance of those who lead and do not even bother to notice who are following. Without being apparently aware of either Italian in the bar, they swirled through the archway which opened on to the restaurant, and disposed themselves round a table. One of the men lingered to order cocktails, with brief directions as to more gin and less anisette than usual. Then he, too, joined the others.

Ettore raised his eyebrows—and Amadéo, languidly taking down one bottle after another from the shelves, smiled bitterly.

"I know them well. They always come here for their cocktails. My shaking is supposed to be the best, so they honour me. Then they go opposite and dine. At Rigoletto's. It has happened ten—twenty times during this past month already. Now we are at the height of the season, and this group leads the fashion at the hotels and the Casino. They are rich, and have titles, and entertain much. Presently they will get up and pay and cross the road."

"Be quiet!" Ettore urgently bade him.

Ettore had just come from England, and could understand their barbarous language. A few words drifted through to him. He listened intently.

"I'm rather sick of the cooking at Rigoletto's. What about it, Reggie? Shall we try dinner here for a change?"

"Oh, no, my dear—no earthly!" (Ettore wondered what that "earthly" could be, of which the *Fortuna* had apparently none.) "Don't you remember Guy Forbes

and Colonel Grierson both told us the food was simply foul here?"

"As though that old dug-out knew good food from bad! Let's try it, anyway—it might be rather a lark!"

"Shall we, Lady Dorothy?"

"Oh, if you like," indifferently. "I daresay all these places are really very much the same."

In a rapid, excited undertone, Ettore translated the conversation to the padrone. For a second, hope flashed into the latter's eyes; then they faded to dullness again.

"If Lisa had been here in time—Lisa's cooking—we might have been saved. But as it is—"

The cocktails were ready, and he lifted the tray to carry them into the next room.

"You will take their orders," commanded Ettore, with sudden surprising firmness, "and you will serve them a dinner more delicious than any they have yet tasted, in Miramiglia, at all events; so that they will go back to the hotel and boast about it, for the English love to boast of having discovered a good place to dine—they are more epicures than one might think, your English. And in three days' time the *Fortuna* will be so crowded that you will have to engage at least two Guidos to wait on your clients, and three Biancas to help Lisa in the kitchen, and Rigo will cut his throat, and your honour will be saved. Now go and take them the cocktails."

Stunned, Amadéo went, without pausing to enquire who was to cook this so stupendous dinner.

And Ettore sat down and wondered if he had been a fool.

He heard Amadéo, in his most plausible padrone manner, discussing various dishes with his clients: Antepasta? But yes, certainly antepasta; olives, anchovies. Minestra? No, they did not care for soup—well, perhaps not. Frutta del mare, then—delicious little soles, crisp baby octopuses, delicately flavoured mullet, fried and served as one harmonious family. And next, he would recommend “pollo alla Fortuna.” Amadéo was certainly in a dream, for he went on to describe the special sauce in which his chickens were wontedly stewed, a subtle succulent blending of oysters, coxcombs and fungi. Yes, yes, let them but leave it to him! And, for a sweet, zabaglione, naturally; his zabaglione was famous—and, indeed, Lisa’s *was* famous; she never spoilt it by the drop too much Marsala, as so many did. What cheese did the nobility like? Bel paese? Gorgonzola? They voted for gorgonzola. And café expresso, and a bottle of Barola. “And don’t keep us waiting too long, will you?”

“Heaven help me,” groaned Amadéo, returning to the bar. “You must have bewitched me. It is impossible, impossible that I should satisfy them with my pollo alla Fortuna. Dio! What am I to do?”

It was Ettore’s great dramatic moment; he grasped it with fine artistry, saying neither too much nor too little.

“You will do nothing, except help me with the dishes and the saucepans, and wait at table and pour out the wine, and stir the sauce when I tell you, and try and not get in my way.”

“You?”

“I cook like a genius,” said Ettore simply, and led the way to the kitchen.

The next hour was for Amadéo such a chaos of emotion, such a bewilderment of extremes, that he has never afterwards attempted to describe it, save for outflung hands, a rolling of eyeballs, and one pregnant “Mà!” Blindly he obeyed Ettore’s sharp instructions, cursing him inwardly, yet reverencing him for his perfect mastery of whatever viands he touched. He, the padrone, he, the magnificent, to perform these menial scullion offices! And yet they had to be done if the dinner were to be a success; and if the dinner were a success, the *Fortuna* would be saved; but if the *Fortuna* were saved, it would be by Ettore, and not by him. And, most bitter of all, Lisa would know it; Lisa might return at any moment now and see him.

In with his emotions, Amadéo mixed a prayer that the dinner should be over, and the diners and Ettore both departed, before Lisa should appear. His nerve-racked hearing recognised her footstep in every sound that passed along outside. Surely that was her laugh? And then he had to smooth out his face to suave decorum, and carry the *frutta del mare* and the *pollo alla Fortuna* into the restaurant, and serve them with a steady hand. How the visitors would stare if suddenly told of the acute personal drama involved in the dishing-up of this dinner for seven!

So Amadéo had to look as though it were an everyday occurrence; and wonder, all the time, what they were saying about the cuisine, try to guess from their

faces, only these English had no faces that spoke; they would look the same if you set down fried leather in front of them. Supposing it were all for nothing, his agony of abasement to Ettore's superiority? Supposing, after all, that Ettore were a mere boaster—Amadéo hated boasting!—and could not cook; indeed, where could he have learnt to cook in England? Supposing, when he got back to the kitchen, Lisa were already there, saying to Ettore: "What, *you* mixing the sauces?" And Ettore replying—what *would* he reply?

Amadéo was in such a state of tension that the only relief he could think of would have been to dash the plates on the floor and rush away. They kept on calling him "waiter," too; "cameriere"—these foreign idiots; could they not see the difference between a waiter and a proprietor? And, indeed, had he but known it, they thought his pink bow tie a little odd. Back to the kitchen again. "We have no fungi; rush out and get some, quick!" Amadéo hurled himself frantically round the corner to the greengrocer; back again; no Lisa yet; long sobbing breath of relief.

"They're ready in there; don't keep them waiting. Here, take this!"

And the little restaurant looked so bright and gay now, even with only this one party such a different atmosphere they created by their abundance of talk, their white shirt-fronts and gleaming evening dresses; flowers on the table, and a menu propped up against the slim-necked bottle of wine. Ettore had thought of all these details. Ettore was Napoleonic; he knew that the impression made must be sharp and ringing and without

any flaw in its accompaniments. Amadéo, dodging to and from the kitchen, could not forbear from pride each time he saw his restaurant rippling once more with gaiety, and the flash of knives and forks, and the tilt of rich crimson in the lifted glasses. Thus a father might feel at sight of a healthy child who has been sick; thus a yachtsman on watching the sails grow round with the good wind after having been long in the doldrums. And if this were indeed the beginning of a new era of prosperity; if it were to be always so in the future, only multiplied tenfold—the padrone rubbed his hands and gave a little chuckle of glee as the party signed to him to bring them a second helping all round. So, then, it must be going all right. Now they had only to hurry, get away before Lisa came—and down, down in a sudden swoop his spirits fell, anticipating how Ettore would swagger and flaunt in front of Lisa, whom he had loved. Ettore was doing it for this; Ettore enjoyed ordering him about.

The stage of coffee was reached at last, but still Lisa had not come. Amadéo was beginning to feel safe. And safer when they mercifully refused liqueurs, and called for the bill. But when they rose, slipped into their cloaks, waved away the change as a tip, and moved towards the door, Amadéo, all personal feelings forgotten for the moment, felt a surge of deep disappointment. If this were all, the *Fortuna* might go under; the *Fortuna* was done for; there would be no more visitors; it would have to be shut up.

And then the last of the visitors to go, he who was apparently the host, said carelessly, taking his hat and

stick from Amadéo: "Lady Dorothy Reeves is giving a supper-party for sixteen on November 11th, the day after to-morrow. It is an English festa. She has asked me to say that she wishes to give it here, and will come in to-morrow to consult you about the menu."

Lady Reeves! Dinner-party for sixteen! Here, and not at Rigoletto's! Amadéo stood in a world where grey despair was shattered into tiny golden splinters of happiness. Success!

One of the English girls at the door, seeing his irradiated face, and with, perhaps, more imagination than the others, called out: "Reggie, tell him we had a top-hole dinner."

"Oh, rather, splendid! Especially the 'fruit of the sea,' or whatever they call it. Tons better than at Rigoletto's."

"Tell him we are coming back here often, Reggie, and sending our pals."

"Because, after all," added the girl who had first thought of complimenting the waiter, padrone, whatever he was, on a good dinner, "he might have noticed us always going opposite after we had had our cocktails here, and been quite hurt about it."

There was little need for Reggie to translate the chorus of praise. Amadéo had understood the ring in their voices. His heart swelled into thankfulness. His *Fortuna!* He stood there, hands folded across his waistcoat, bowing and bowing, murmuring his thanks, as a great actor takes his call before the curtain.

A glorious evening—but what a pity Ettore should have been mixed up in it!

Slowly he went back to the kitchen. Ettore was sitting among what looked like the ruins of Carthage. He looked exhausted and not at all comely. His fat face was pale, and smeared with charcoal and perspiration; his hair was comically on end; and, because he had not stayed to get into proper costume, his best suit was stained with drippings. He did not enquire whether the new clients had praised his creations, knowing, as a genius always knows, that there could be no question about it. He merely raised his eyes toward Amadéo, who shortly, woodenly, repeated Lady Reeves' order for the day after to-morrow.

"Good," said Ettore, but without moving from the chair. He was suffering just that staleness of reaction which was inevitable after his mighty spurt. If only Lisa had returned early enough to see him for once a lordly dog in enjoyment of his day; a general, coping with disaster and transforming it to success; a supreme artist divinely absorbed. If only Lisa had seen him—she who had so often seen him as merely the snubbed little clown of Miramiglia, and Amadéo the hero.

Amadéo wished impatiently that the fellow would go. His presence was causing him an uneasiness so acute that it amounted to positive fear. Ettore meant no harm; Ettore had always been a kind little man, not much in anybody's way. By these methods did Amadéo try to reassure himself, to restore his lost complacency, and crush down a horrible feeling of inferiority. Ettore had done him a service; well, well, he would see that Ettore did not suffer for it. He had no grudge against Ettore. So thought Amadéo, who would have against Ettore for

all the future the same deep grudge that the lion surely bore towards the mouse.

A sound. A rustle in the doorway. A merry voice that cried: "Ebbene?"

Both men swung round. There stood Lisa. She had come back a little too soon for Amadéo, a little too late for Ettore. She was prettier than ever, in a new shawl and skirt she had bought in Turin, and an irresistible smile that carried her straight into Amadéo's arms.

"Lisa, mia tesore! Carina! Lisa mia!"

Ettore looked on.

Presently Lisa noticed him, nodded, and held out her hands. She would rather not have had Ettore there, in the rapture of home-coming. In fact, she had forgotten his very existence. But still, one cannot be impolite. But had he been always so greasy?

"And how flourishes our little business, caro Amadéo? You did not say much in your letters. Have you had any triumphs?"

Slowly Amadéo lifted his eyes and looked at Ettore. It was coming now, his worst moment of all. He had thought to have touched bottom when he faced telling Lisa that the restaurant had slumped into failure during her absence; had, indeed, been solely dependent on her; and that he, left to himself, had brought it to a point of bankruptcy. But he found now, curiously enough, that there was not half the bitterness in this as there would be in having to stand there silent in front of Lisa, and listen to Ettore's account of the evening's drama, watching Ettore grow into a heroic figure of stupendous importance, while he himself dwindled and

shrank into a poor little incompetent atom. Amadéo's handsome, bold face was white and strained. He looked at Ettore, and his look said: "I am helpless." The moment clenched like a fist.

"What is it?" said Lisa, with her bright bird's glance from one man to the other. "Are you keeping something from me?"

Ettore rose heavily to his feet.

"I must go," he said. "Addio, Lisa."

THE 1865

I AM aware," said Sir Elwin Strickland, half closing his eyes, the better to draw up the aroma from the cognac which lay in a fiery pool at the bottom of his enormous tulip-shaped glass, "I am aware that when a man of fifty-nine asks a young woman of—twenty-four, is it? Ah yes—of twenty-four, to be his wife, I am aware that he ought to talk profusely and sentimentally about May and December. Need I, however?"

Pamela laughed, and shook her pretty head. "No, I'll let you off."

He looked relieved. "Just so. You must have heard it all so often. You're the type that has always attracted December—probably because you take more trouble with a rich old man than you do with a poor young one."

Pamela's apple-blossom complexion deepened slightly. "I'm not sure if I like that!"

He watched her, coolly amused at having drawn her fire. "Because it's true!"

"Perhaps!"

"Well, let's be truthful. It will save trouble later on when we are husband and wife. I may as well tell you that I don't dream for a single moment of babbling about my years as an impediment to our match; wondering whether I dare ask you to immure yourself with a man old enough to be your grandfather. In fact, I con-

sider on the whole, my child, that you're lucky, and that all the benefits are showered from my side—material benefits, that goes without saying—but the other kind as well. I have wisdom, experience, subtlety, and if I may say so, a sort of white-haired distinction. Why in heaven's name should I wax maudlin over this young girl's fresh youth, when she peddles it for all these advantages? Why should I bow humbly before a hobbledehoy alternative whose trespassing would be as a crowd of picknickers trampling and tearing through a wood of bluebells? *Why?*" . . . Yet his sad light eyes wistfully challenged his own bluff. He would have liked to be young again, for Pamela!

"A wood of bluebells?" she mocked him. "Do I really remind you of a wood of bluebells? Do go on, Sir Elwin. This is refreshingly like sentiment, after all."

Although his tone was caustic, his eyes twinkled appreciation. Then: "Will you marry me, Pamela? As you see, I'm not in the least humble, and if you behave like a minx, I shall shut you up and beat you. On the other hand, having taken all that I can richly provide, if you attempt to enlist sympathy by standing huddled with your back to the wall, your eyes like the eyes of a shot pheasant moaning: 'I am so young, so young, so *young!*'—then I'll do worse than lock you up and beat you; I'll put you in a glass case and exhibit you in the Natural History Museum, in the parasite section!"

And again Pamela's laugh rippled through the small and surpassingly expensive restaurant which was the scene of this original courtship. The sound drew the attention of a good-looking but austere dark boy of

about fifteen, who had just taken his seat with an elderly man at the next table. The boy stared at Pamela, but absently, as though, while her laugh existed, she had no presence to back the impression. Pamela was not used to such lack of compliment, even from a boy's gaze. Her own eyes flashed stormily . . . then she twisted herself round in her chair, and devoted all her attention to Sir Elwin.

. . . Meanwhile, Vernon Barracott's father was looking in a worried fashion at his son, while his hand fingered the wine list and the *à la carte*.

"Will you have—ah—plum duff or spotted dog?"

The boy smiled faintly. "Neither, thank you, father. They're the same thing. And certainly pudding is out of place before the caviare!"

The connoisseur's knitted brows relaxed slightly at the word "caviare." "You will drink, I presume," he went on, "ginger-pop?" His tongue fingered the word fastidiously, as though it were unfamiliar and he hoped it would remain so. "Or, as this is a—ah—grand bust up, let's go the whole hog and make it fizz, shall we?"

"Father," replied Vernon, "both your language and your suggestions are revolting to me. I prefer a white Burgundy to a white Bordeaux with the fish, but we must not ignore the claims of a Palatinate vintage, for instance, a Ruppertsberger. After that, I leave the choice to you. I'm only an ignorant uncouth schoolboy!"

And then Guy Barracott knew that this was indeed his son, with his very own tastes and his own reticences. Their evening together was a happy one.

"On the night you are twenty-one, Vernon, we will

open my last bottle of the 1865 Hermitage. My boy, you won't know what love and passion can be, till you have drunk that wine and of that year! By Saint Dionysius—"He became lyrical and a little absurd.

. . . And then he died. Not that same evening, but a few months later. In his will, he made the superlative mistake of his life. He named for his son's trustees, two shrewd, worthy, honourable solicitors, both connoisseurs in wine. . . .

When Vernon Barracott came into his inheritance, including one of the best cellars in the kingdom, there was no 1865 red Hermitage.

"Where," he cried wrathfully, to his worthy, shrewd and honourable trustees, "where is that one priceless peerless bottle from the hill on which Saint Christopher built his shrine?"

There was a faint quiver in the atmospheric reaction of the two elderly solicitors. . . . A clairvoyant might have said that they licked their chops. But sadly they shook their heads, and spoke of dishonest butlers.

Vernon Barracott went out into the world, feeling that destiny had robbed him. One day, he vowed, he would drink a glass of the '65 Hermitage. Often his father had described to him the quality and perfection of its colour, its aroma and bouquet; its deep glowing wallflower browns and purples; and that elusive flavour, more maddening than a woman's charm, which men, crude sportsmen, have named 'gun-flint'; his father had started him down a trail of the dreams, now wild and dark, now soft, caressing and velvety, which are flung

in the wake of this divine gift from Bacchus; dreams of ecstasy yearning, and ecstasy satisfied. . . .

Being a sensible young man, he began his pilgrimage by going to Tain-Tournon, the very source of Hermitage, and speaking with the few owners who divided the quiet slopes of the hill. To his surprise, though they murmured courteous responses when he mentioned the 1865, he could only rouse them to real enthusiasm on the subject of *very* weak whisky and water, as a beverage.

"Well, but the 1865—may I have some? May I have twelve dozen bottles?" asked Vernon, shyly.

In chorus they laughed, wagging their beards. Each one just dimly remembered what each one's father had said, when drinking the last remaining bottle of all the '65 that had remained in cellar with them. As for the rest of the yield, it had been casked, bottled, and sold out into the great world. Finally, one charming old vintner was able to trace in his books a fairly recent sale, not more than thirty-nine years ago, to a well-known London wine-merchant.

The ardent lover hastened back to London, flushed with the prospect of an easy end to his quest. The well-known London wine-merchant, a man echoing in his pleasant mellow personality most of the adjectives that appeared in his own catalogues, smiled reminiscently at mention of the 1865 Hermitage, and said: "Oh, yes. Yes. A glorious wine. My father had some in his private cellars. I remember how he told me that on drinking the last bottle—"

"A murrain on all your fathers!" cried the impatient pilgrim. "A pest and a murrain and a plague!"

Mr. Manfred looked mildly astonished. He had been fond of his father. His visitor was obviously not sane. . . . Look at the way he was flinging himself round the room, now and then picking up a specimen bottle of Imperial Tokay as if he would smash it against the wall, and then reluctantly returning it to its niche.

"Fathers!" he raved; "Wherever I go, I hear nothing but this prattle of fathers and last bottles! Did none of your fathers die *before* they had had the last bottle? Were they all so damned healthy that their besotted cringing doctors allowed them to go on drinking wine, and a heavy wine at that, long after they should have been put on a diet of barley-water and milk-and-soda? Fathers, indeed! Father me no fathers!"

"I won't, I won't," Mr. Manfred soothed him. "As it happens, I seem to remember that we didn't keep and drink quite all that purchase of the '65. Wait a minute. . . . It comes back to me now! Sir Elwin Strickland—no, it would have been *his* father; it was before I came into the firm, of course—yes, surely he was promised half of it. Old Sir Reginald Strickland and my father were great cronies. The whole yield is very small, as of course you know, and very difficult to acquire, but I think—"

Vernon stood muted, trembling, expectant, while bells were rung, and respectful young men were sent in search of ancient ledgers.

"Here we are?" cried Mr. Manfred, at last. "Yes, a dozen bottles only, and a great favour at that. I have

heard connoisseurs swear that there was no vintage like this in the whole history of wine. Well now, *that's* all right!" He beamed encouragingly on young Vernon Barracott. "Now, all you have to do is to get to know Sir Elwin Strickland. He's quite a well-known connoisseur; eccentric old fellow; lives in Chester Square. Perhaps by degrees he might grow to like you; if you pamper him a bit: flowers to his wife, and so on. And then, one day, if you are tactful—but I'd go slow if I were you, very very slow—however, as I was saying, perhaps one day, with a bit of luck—"

"Oh yes," bitterly Vernon interrupted him, "perhaps one day, after wasting my youth, I may have the pleasure of hearing him tell me how, fifty years ago, his father had broken the seal of the last bottle of the 1865. Thank you, I'd rather buy a bottle of three-and-sixpenny Barsac, instead, at the grocer's."

"No don't do that. That's taking a desperate view," quoth Mr. Manfred, smiling. "I shall be seeing Sir Elwin in a day or two, and I'll find out from him—without saying why, of course!—if any of the '65 still remains; and I'll let you know. And after that, it's up to you!"

. . . In spite of his optimistic declaration that Pamela had derived a fuller sum of benefits than he, from their union, Sir Elwin was nevertheless surprised that for the first few years of this marriage, there were no suitors in the courtyard; then, quite suddenly, the courtyard, figuratively speaking, seemed to be thronged with them. With his usual affectation of cynical detachment, but

inwardly very badly frightened, Sir Elwin counted them: Donald Liddell, Edward Gulliver, George Leyton, Alistair Wynne, Ronnie Marsh, Tommy Curtis, Gaspard Le Marchant. Finally, young Vernon Barracott, whom the husband feared most; for he had youth, slim dark passionate youth, youth with its adorable shyness, its white fires, without alas, any of the trampling hobbledehoy clumsiness which—the elderly connoisseur had often and soothingly reassured himself—must necessarily be youth's accompaniment.

Barracott was decorative, undeniably decorative; and he added the final burnished grace of mystery to his attractions. For though he was for ever wooing his lady, yet he never, by word, nor by touch, nor indeed by look, claimed a reward. He was, in fact, that ideal swain who is for ever pursuing. Flowers and flowers and many flowers he sent to Pamela, and— Ah! the wily fellow!—an occasional curio or etching or some such suitable toy to Sir Elwin himself, to divert suspicion from the very meadows and hot-houses of adoration with which he filled their house. Books, too, in strange and beautiful bindings, were part of this stubborn siege for Pamela's favour; and royal boxes for the theatre and opera. He was a queer freakish boy, this Vernon Barracott; for, having got the measure of her hand—some glove carelessly left behind, perhaps, in the big cinnamon-coloured Rolls-Royce in which his fortune enabled him to drive her, sometimes!—he suddenly conceived the idea of sending her gloves: no ordinary gloves, but such as Marie Antoinette or Queen Elizabeth might have worn; a fantasy, a saraband of gloves; gloves broidered

or slashed or pearled, gloves of the finest and softest skins, gloves gauntleted and furred. And after each fresh arrival of delicate five-fingered compliment, Pamela would say with a shrug—as though, careless rogue, she did not care—“We had better ask him to dinner” or “Perhaps he will lunch with us” or “Do you mind, Elwin, if we ask Vernon to come on to supper after the show to-night?” Once, even, she asked him to breakfast, and this, thought her jealous protector, was carrying things a little too far; for about breakfast there is a warmth, a bacon-and-kidney intimacy. . . .

Then, all in a minute, she stopped asking him, as though she were tired of him.

“This,” reflected Sir Elwin, “is the dangerous time. From now onward, I must watch.”

So, from now onward, genial invitations radiated from him instead of from Pamela; for obviously it involved least effort for Sir Elwin to watch his young wife and her suitor at his own table. Besides, he was a not disagreeable guest, this Vernon Barracott. He had travelled; knew much about food; more, even, about wine. But while they were at the very height of discussion over some rivalry, for instance, between Chateau Yquem as opposed to Montrachet to be drunk with *filets de sole Ravigotte*, the young man would unexpectedly check, stammer, blush scarlet, and forget to go on . . . as though some longing had profoundly moved him to declare his passion. . . .

Then Sir Elwin would glance at Pamela. And she, more often than not, would be lost as in a dream, chin propped on her hand, lips half smiling. . . .

"In love," decided Sir Elwin, grimly.

The symptoms increased. Pamela started when she was spoken to, spent infinite pains over her toilet, murmured in her sleep, sighed at her meals, sang in her bath, sobbed at her looking-glass; she declared a wish to live in the country instead of in town, because sunsets were so beautiful; she gave way to inexplicable fits of rage with her maid; she left vast gaps of time unaccounted for, in recital of her day's doings to her husband, and then, confused, tried to cover them with a tightly stretched tissue of falsehood, not even acceptable to the most credulous of marines.

And Sir Elwin was not a marine. Far from it. "She's irrevocably in love," he decided. "What, then, is to be done?"

Let it be at once stated that there was one terror at which this elderly patrician was wont to blink, and that was the terror of being made to look a fool. And now, despite his good looks, his wealth, his breeding, his taste in wine, and his rejection of all that was obvious, coarse or silly; in spite of his wit, his discernment, his generosity, and the crisp way in which his grey hair curled back from his temples; in spite of his brave record as a soldier, earned in the days when war was still a dashing pastime; in spite of having snubbed to death one wife, a timid creature; of having been divorced by a second, a moral creature—(and a very jolly and impudent divorce, redounding entirely to the glory of Sir Elwin!)—in spite of all this, was he still to live and look a fool, and not be able to avert it? When he married Pamela, he exposed himself to this peril, certainly; every

man is an Achilles who wantonly pulls off his vulnerable boot to lay bare his vulnerable heel. It is a perversity in his nature that tempts him to do so. But then, Pamela was so very lovely! And then, and yet again, he had dreamed of making himself secure beforehand by his caustic acceptance of the May and December situation; he had challenged laughter with his own laughter; he had called the situation a cliché; he had boasted of his indifference towards a possible hobbledehoy lover in the future: May-time to May-time! Mating time . . .

Thus, after seven years' immunity, his vigilance relaxed. May became June. Pamela was thirty-one. And enter April, twenty-one, and no hobbledehoy at that, but slim, supple, and burning with a dark and silent ardour.

This loitering about, anticipating cuckoldry, was unbearable to Sir Elwin Strickland. Nor could the doom be averted, now. Anyone watching Pamela and young Barracott could see that they loved. They were both rapt and silent, awaiting consummation; awaiting some glorious swing upward into the very dazzle of fulfilment. Lovers, indeed, when you watched and studied them apart, as Sir Elwin perpetually did. Less lovers, and more an enigma, when you watched and studied their behaviour together. But was that surprising, in the presence of the lady's husband? The lady's husband had no doubts. It was a question of any moment. So then his lordliness rose to the occasion. He would not be cuckolded. No, he would give them to each other, April and June. He himself, with magnificent bounty, would make the way easy for their love, for their ultimate

wedding. He would have to divorce her, a very quiet and discreet divorce, as quiet and discreet as money could make it. His money, mind you, and his power!—Oh, generous Sir Elwin! If he were himself the man to move around the hands of the clock, who could then laugh at him if the hands of the clock went round? Sir Elwin was proud; he adored Pamela, but he would give her to Vernon Barracott, and he would compel their respect by the gesture with which he did it: a certain stately formality; or perhaps, alternatively, in the spirit of cynical but kindly humour. He could not decide beforehand which way the mood would take him to act his part; but he had some good lines to deliver, and the stage should be set, again by himself, for their delivery—"And their deliverance!"—mocking at the vision of the elderly husband's sanction, nay, suggestion of such an elopement. . . .

Never mind that! Not cuckolded, at least; not cuckolded. "Pity the poor blind!"—No friend or acquaintance, gossiping hereafter, would have cause to say that of him. They would marvel, perhaps, at his gesture; disapprove, perhaps; or more violently be angered by it; but not deride!

. . . "On Friday week, the eighteenth of this month, is my birthday," said Sir Elwin Strickland to Vernon Barracott. "I shall be sixty-five. I hope you will do us the pleasure of dining with us that night. Pamela hopes so, too."

Pamela, her indifference slightly overdone—thus Sir Elwin, in rather finicky criticism!—echoed the invitation; said that she would be delighted.

Barracott bowed. They were a little like figures of a past generation, pacing a formal minuet. A very handsome trio of figures.

Sir Elwin went on: "I mean to celebrate it with pomp and ceremony. . . . You may have noticed, Barracott, that I am a very pompous old man. Pamela shall wear the most expensive new frock she can devise, between now and then; and I will bring up the last of my '65 Hermitage!" And to himself he added, relishing his pose: "An appropriate wine . . . for renunciation!"

. . . Sir Elwin Strickland was decanting the 1865. Naturally, the butler had just given notice; for if a butler be not on the premises to decant the super-wines of his cellar, for what then had his master engaged him, fourteen years ago? Mason lingered in the dining-room, casting malevolent glances at Sir Elwin's proceedings.

Sir Elwin was feeling both cheerful and uplifted. Why not? It was his birthday. Here at his own table, in his own home, he was going to drink one of the finest vintages of the world. . . . And thereafter, he was going to surprise two people out of their very skins, and with a superb gesture, save his own face. Afterwards, of course, he would be a broken man . . . but that, too, would have its attractions: "He's taking it splendidly!" in a hushed a reverent whisper from the compassionate mob. . . . And he, one hand shielding his eyes, that their slight moisture might not betray him to those who looked on—

Not bad! Not bad at all!

"It is right that the young should be happy! It is

inevitable that the old should be lonely," murmured Sir Elwin, wiping the neck of the bottle.

"H'indeed, sir," said the butler frigidly, glaring at the usurper.

Sir Elwin had not been aware that his subconscious was already rehearsing his speech aloud; for his conscious mind was preoccupied in watching the melted garnet of the '65 slowly run through its appointed funnel into the heavy Waterford decanter.

"Liable to throw an unusually heavy sediment, this wine," remarked Sir Elwin, airily.

"H'indeed, sir," again, from the displeased, dispossessed butler.

His employer felt compelled to go on chatting amiably, showing that he did not care a damn for Mason's chagrin: "Lady Strickland not down yet? You know, Mason, positively she forgot to give me a birthday present."

"H'indeed, sir." No sympathy there.

Sir Elwin cadged for it: "One might have thought . . . but perhaps she has one in reserve, to give me at a supreme moment, to-night. Your mistress, Mason, has a most excellent touch with supreme moments."

"H'indeed, sir!"

"And I myself," continued Sir Elwin, desperately attacking the ramparts of dignity, "I myself intend to bestow a gift on my wife, this very evening."

"H'indeed, sir; and what—" Mason had broken down—"and what might that be?"

—And at that supreme moment, when baronet and servitor were on the very brink of sweet communion,

the footman brought in a note, gracefully, even jauntily folded into a cocked hat.

"What's this? What's this?"

"Her ladyship, sir. Asked me to give it to you at 7.35 precisely, sir. Just before you had your sherry, sir."

"And why the devil," enquired his lordship, but without the slightest shadow of apprehension, "why the devil didn't she have it put into an envelope?"

Naturally, Herbert had no idea of the odd little breezes and kinks, of the mysterious reversion to a great-grandmother who positively thrived on intrigue, of the tendency towards mischief and badinage, which had impelled Pamela to fold her note into the form of a cocked hat, instead of more decorously putting it into an envelope stamped with the Strickland crest and motto. For the crest was: "Sable, on a field vert, an oak tree proper." And the motto: "*Hic sto, hic maneo.*" "Where I am, I remain."

And Pamela had not remained.

"My dear Husband,

It is not, alas, possible for me to declare myself less heartlessly than by saying I have left you for a much younger man. And if I try to modify such heartlessness by adding that even if the man were older, much older than yourself, I would still leave you for him, does that make it better or worse? I'm afraid, worse.

Please don't forgive me. I can at least release you from that weary obligation. Stamp, roar, rage, if you are human enough! I won't even insult you by pretending that I have ever found you human, except once, and that was this morning, when I saw you looking

surprised that I had no birthday present for you. Yet a birthday present from me, now and to-day—wouldn't that have been a joke that was too ironic even to be pleasant?

I am very happy. I've never been happy before. I wonder if you are heroic enough to drink my health to-night in the famous '65, saying as you raise your glass: 'She was an impudent minx! I can do without her!'—For you can, you know. But I can't do without myself, and that's one of the reasons why I've run away from you. I wanted to enclose a photograph, to show the other reason, but he won't let me!

Pamela."

. . . Cuckolded, after all!

They had slipped away from his benevolence, Pamela and Vernon, three hours too soon; and left him looking a fool. . . . A rush of dark red blood, darker than the wine of Hermitage, suffused Sir Elwin's neck and face. He glared round at Mason and Herbert, as though wondering where to strike with his fists. And though they had been so deeply interested in the reading of the note, that they would gladly have tiptoed up to Sir Elwin, one on each side of him, and read it over his right and his left shoulder, yet they now deemed it prudent to slide and slither away, out of that room where rage was boxed in. In point of fact, Herbert had heard the peal of the front-door bell, and his instincts sprang to duty.

Baffled of live prey for his wrath, Strickland's eye was caught and fascinated by the elaborate preparations he had made for that night's ceremonial renunciation.

With a curse on Barracott, slim black privateer that slid so silently into other men's harbours, he lifted the decanter filled with the contents of that precious last bottle, and dashed it against the marble fireplace. . . .

Ah, the uncontrollable pressure was relieved, now! One sacrifice, at least. . . .

Vernon Barracott stood in the doorway, appalled.

He had come to-night, after long seeking, to meet his love . . . and had found her in pools and splashes of dark red on the marble hearth. Apprehension did not leave him a second's solace of doubt. . . . At once he had seen the empty bottle of '65 on the sideboard, beside the properties for decanting. The label told him all.

He lost his temper. "What have you done?" he shouted, in an incontrollable fury. Did ever quest end in so tantalising a disaster?

Sir Elwin swung round and faced his guest. "*You?* . . . What the hell are *you* doing here?"

"You invited me!"

"You ran away with my wife!"

"I didn't!"

"You did! You have!"

"Wife! Wives! Good God, man, that was the last bottle!"

"Bottles! Good God, that was my last wife! I'm sixty-five. Scoundrel, what have you done with her?"

"It was the 'sixty-five!—Why did you smash it, you fool?"

"You fool!"

"You—you fool!"

“You f-f-fool!!!”

PAMELA and Alistair gazed deeply and fondly into each other's eyes. The cliffs of Dover slowly misted and drew away. Presently they would see France. . . .

ENGLISH EARTH

ENGLISH EARTH

THE MAN sitting on the stone wall of the terrace, the child, and the grave king in dark marble astride of his dark marble charger, were the only three beings to be seen that sunset in the deserted gardens of the Royal Palace of Budapest.

“If this were twenty-five years ago,” reflected Nicholas Broome, wallowing in picturesque regrets, “between me and the Danube would pass a constant procession of officers in green or azure blue uniforms, with short, furred cloaks, each with a lovely lady leaning on his arm. . . . And the Great Ballroom would be a-gleam and a-glitter and a-swing with bare shoulders and clanking swords and crystal candelabra . . . if this were twenty-five years ago!”

Nick was rattling nonsense to himself very fast indeed, to combat the slow mists of depression that were settling on his soul, ever since, late that afternoon, he had crossed St. Elizabeth’s Bridge from new Pest to old Buda, to explore the steep, silent little streets, cobbled lanes that lurched drunkenly uphill between silent little houses with coloured tiles and bulging windows, which all led to the Moorish Cathedral of St. Matthias.

It was a dead city on this bank of the Danube. Did nobody live in Buda, nor walk along the chestnut alleys

beside the river? The few shops and restaurants looked as though they had no owners, and expected no customers; not squalidly struggling against poverty—but as if they had simply stopped, acquiescent, a hand laid upon their mainspring's ticking, when Royalty went out of the Royal Palace. And now where gallant officers had walked, with fur on their cloaks, and each with a lovely lady on his arm, remained only empty terraces and empty lawns rimmed by flower-beds ironically gay; and one tall Englishman meditating on a stone wall; and, near by, one small Hungarian boy playing round the statue of Arpad; Arpad, the first conqueror of Hungary.

. . . And Nick began to watch, intently, this living atom who was, after all, so much more interesting than images of dead pageantry; and, somehow, woke to the certain and yet puzzling conclusion that it was a small English boy. How be so sure that he was English, dressed in that local style of bright striped blouse and linen knickers? It was the way he *played*. . . . Unconscious of being observed, he had thrown himself ardently into some drama of a messenger bringing news to Arpad—bad news—seize the King's rein and run for your life, nay, for his life, beside the galloping steed. . . . Too late. . . . Overtaken. . . . Well, out with your sword, then, and defend his life with your own—But a revolver, instead, was the imaginary weapon that the boy drew from his hip-pocket; and a sort of sturdy restraint about his gestures, the quality of his low growling defiance at the imaginary enemy, lack of hysteria in the entire representation of danger and death—and then “Hurrah! Hurrah!” . . .

"Bound to be partly English, at any rate!" Nick Broome drew out his pipe and lit it. He was feeling happier now. He liked children.

. . . But—was this a new game that the small boy was playing? He had tired of escape and battle, obviously; his gestures flagged; his thin, determined little face took on a look of tragedy, of want, that was not the robust mimic tragedy of five minutes ago. The sun had set, now, and the huddled town behind them had dropped its illusion of living warmth. The boy seemed to hesitate, looked up that way once or twice as though speculating whether he should return home, whether there were any human welcome at home to make returning worth his while. . . . Then, his lips tightly pressed together, his dark, wide-set eyes oddly frightened, he climbed on to the statue, pulled himself erect on his feet beside Arpad, stood there an instant, swaying—

Nick started forward, alarmed. He recognised that look, now, though last time he had seen it was not on a child's face. That woman, just before she jumped off Waterloo Bridge. . . . But the little boy had jumped already, by the time Nick reached him.

It was not very far to the ground. He lay quite still, clasping his leg, as though it hurt him. But his face was tranquil now; a quaint sparkle of mischief, even, lurked in it, as though he had achieved a desired and desirable end. "Hullo!" he exclaimed, "I say, I've twisted my leg. . . . Oh!" And, as Nick tried to lift him, he began to cry, quite naturally.

"All right—steady!" Nick quickly improvised a

splint, and then, with great gentleness, lifted him again. "I'm going to carry you home, Sonny. Where do you live?"

"Up there—not far—I'll show you," he pointed towards old Buda. "My name is Ladislás Boldicott; *he* calls me Laddie."

"He?"

"My father!" And the boy might equally have said "My hero!" for the pride and love that throbbed, unconcealed, in his voice.

Ladislás Boldicott? It sounded wholly foreign, at first, to Broome's ear. Several kings of Hungary had been called Ladislás. But Boldicott? Why, yes, surely, a common name, in the West Country. There had been old José Boldicott, down at Bideford.

"Here!" Laddie pointed to a tiny café with a few green-painted tables on the pavement outside. "We live upstairs." The café was empty, even of its proprietor, and like every other shop in Buda, appeared to be asleep, undisturbed by any prospect of imminent trade. "He'll be sitting at the window," remarked Laddie, weary but contented; though his leg was paining him.

Nick Broome, whose nature was to be wildly inquisitive over the secret life, the life behind the surface, of all his fellow-humans, wondered if he were soon to learn why a young Englishman with the West Country name of Boldicott should so certainly be sitting at a window looking down on to a narrow street in old Buda, where nothing at all happened, ever, to look at. And why his son should be called Ladislás, after three kings of Hungary. And why this same little son should have—

"Laddie!"

"I've hurt my leg, jumping!" announced the sufferer.

"This man carried me home. He's English."

.

Garth Boldicott was a mystery, too.

His hand-clasp was without any warmth or grip to it. His eyes surveyed Broome politely but without interest. He refrained from questioning the stranger who had carried in his son—but refrained from lack of fellowship, not from courtesy. He seemed, indeed, to have no human contacts at all; at any rate, to have severed any that he might ever have had. No—"severed" is too sharp-cut a word; to have let them slip, listlessly, from his heart. His conversation was intelligent enough; but without the pull in it, the stir and shift of feeling when the pulse urges it from behind. He neither hated nor loved, this dead young Englishman, who sat nearly all day in a chair by a low window bulging over a dead street in old Buda, as though there were nothing else to do, for him. He was encased in ice. Again and again Broome struck at the invisible encasement, hoping to hew through to some answering quickness or vitality—even anger, if need be. It was no good. Only with Laddie did Broome show any ordinary human tenderness, and that was because the boy had hurt his leg and needed help. The leg began to mend after three or four days, and in consequence, protective instinct ebbed to indifference again. . . .

Nick came often, that week, to see Laddie. He liked him. And besides, there was something he wanted to understand. Suddenly it occurred to him that it was

hardly fair to play a watching game with a child; you must meet him on level ground; ask him a straightforward question and trust to luck that he will not turn his back on you.

"When you fell off the horse's back, Laddie—?"

"I didn't," quickly and proudly. Well, and it would be an idiotic piece of bungling, for a nimble-footed nine-year-old! "I didn't."

"Jumped off?"

"Yes."

It had to be said now: "On purpose—to hurt yourself?"

Laddie nodded. His dark eyes were full of tears that had not been there a moment ago.

Nick waited. He had no wish unduly to pry, to go rummaging where Laddie kept his sorrows and his treasures; but surely, surely, here he could do something; it was absurd to allow any man to live on like Boldicott, for fear of being indelicate, of interfering. Why—a child was unhappy! . . . Nick was hotly angry with this piece of mechanism that walked and spoke, ate and drank and slept, and did no more, and nevertheless could call a boy ardent and flushed and responsive like Laddie: "My son."

"He doesn't take any notice of me when I'm all right," said Laddie, at last, in a voice very carefully controlled. "And when it goes on too long, like that, I—I want him to awfully." And Broome could glimpse, as through a swiftly-opened casement, the loneliness, the pent-up nervous strain, for the boy, contained in the phrase "like that." "He was quite different when I had

fever, twice; and once when I'd been fighting and they'd rolled me over, though they were three, but one of them was a girl, but she was older than I was so it almost counts as a boy—"

"Quite," his companion assented, gravely.

"He's different, then," Laddie finished. And shrugged his shoulders with an adult resignation which somehow expressed his forlorn state more poignantly than any wail of complaint. "One can't be always hurting one's leg!" Which was so manifestly true that Nick found no adequate reply.

He invited Garth Boldicott to an evening's fellowship across the river, in Pest, where the cabarets and coffee-houses and hotels, and the tree-shaded promenade beside the Danube, were all flowing with processions of laughing men and women of all nationalities, some prosperous and many indigent, but perhaps the most vital crowd to be found in any capital of Europe.

At the Café d'Ostende, the Tzigane band, lean swarthy men in dingy black coats, improvised gloriously until their violin music surged over the gilt walls and swelled from floor to ceiling; till the space was so packed with ecstasy that it became unbearable. . . . And then the violins were silent, and the violin leader looked about him to see who was offering him champagne. Americans were usually generous!—Ah, yes, there was a rich-looking party of them beckoning him. . . . "Sure he's like the Archangel Gabriel!" whispered one awed American girl to her sister. Boldicott just faintly smiled at the "Archangel," as he sauntered past their corner table, towards his reward.

"My brother-in-law," he explained to Broome.

"Your wife was a Tzigane, then?" He was determined to ask any question that arose in his mind, rather than repress it to spare his companion pain. Pain was better than numbness; and fury than apathy. It might, he reflected, in the spirit of sheer self-sacrifice, work out ultimately as a good thing for Garth Boldicott to be on trial for the knifing of one Nicholas Broome!

"Yes. One of the loveliest in Hungary. She died when Laddie was a year old." So wooden was his speech, that he might have been talking of the death of his aunt's White Orpington—a real beauty!

"How did you meet her?"

"We danced together at a wedding. Not far from here, a village out on the plains. I came mooching down through Central Europe directly after the War was over."

"But you've been home since?"

"Back to England, you mean? No."

"That's—incredible," exclaimed Broome.

"Why?"

Nick fortified himself with golden Tokay. Next, he delivered himself of an exceedingly amusing burlesque in terms of romantic rhapsody, on "home," and then he said, slowly and deliberately: "The conventions between two Englishmen dictate that I must not talk to you of things like home or love of country or death or white-haired mothers, without an artificial pretence that these are minor matters, to be brushed aside hurriedly, or else referred to as though they were deucedly funny. But I meant every word I said just now."

"What of it?" queried Boldicott, "*I* don't mind. Getting rather slow here, don't you think? Shall we push on to the Papagaly?"

They pushed on to the Café Papagaly, where brilliant cardboard parrots swung from perches, uttering benisons on the motley dancers swirling in the cramped space between the tables. Under cover of the full-blooded yells of a joyous nigger orchestra, Garth Boldicott began to talk; in dry, passionless sentences, he talked of the War, of the six months spent, on and off, crouching between a line and a line of mud; of the monotonous two and a half years in a German prison camp, where they were not even cruel to him.

"What had you got to think about?" interrupted Nick. "After all, everything depends on that, in these infernal intervals of day and night dullness. What were you before the War? What was going on in England? Who wrote to you?"

"My sister. Yes, Kate wrote to me, regularly." And he repeated the word: "regularly," as though it were a form of reproach. "She wrote to me about the farm. My father had been what you would call 'a gentleman farmer,' down in Devon, and I was the second son, so that I didn't inherit. To make up for it, when he died he left me more than enough to buy a small place of my own, to work, over the borders in Cornwall. Only about ninety acres. I was very keen about it."—And oh, the dreary lack of keenness, of any boyishness whatsoever, in his utterance. Yet, after all, he was not much over thirty, and, strangely, looked a good deal less. "I chose Kate out of all my sisters to come and help me run

it. We were good pals, Kate and I, and she liked being chosen. When we'd been at it less than a year, I had to go. Kate promised to run Boldicott's for me as though I were there. I hated leaving it, just to go and lie about wasting time, doing nothing, when I might have been ploughing, sowing grain, helping the ewes in the lambing season. Fighting would have been different, but I had bad luck, and didn't get in the thick of it at all until one minor scrimmage, when I was stunned by a shell bursting near me, and then taken prisoner. We never failed to get our letters, where I was shut up. They were decent about that. The farm seemed to be doing well. According to Kate, it was doing better than anyone else's. Never any disease among the crops; and the weather like an obedient servant. Her letters were full of how well it was doing, and what good prices everything fetched, and how I wasn't to worry a bit, nor fret at things going wrong without me there, because nothing went wrong. Nothing at all. They were long letters. It was decent of Kate. She told me every detail, of just what was coming up, and how it looked, and what people were saying about Boldicott's, envying us our luck—"

The young Englishman, who nine years ago had drifted down to Budapest, and there had squandered his dreaming life away, broke off at the burst of noisy applause which welcomed the appearance of the next dancer on the cabaret programme—Mitzi Vronje, a thin little genius with an impudent face, crowned with an enormous Napoleon hat. Her green Napoleon coat was reduced to absurdity by fur collar and cuffs of ex-

travagant size. Her red silk tights were a further irrelevance, and her harlequin shoes; and her dance was like a series of alluring capers, in which she strutted like a Pasha; she drilled like a soldier; she was graceful as a sylph, as an autumn leaf! She embodied, indeed, Cosmopolis that was neither East nor West, neither moral nor deliberately evil, but just gay. Mitzi Vronje! The lookers-on at the Papagaly shouted with laughter, and shouted her name. The parrots dangled in a concerned sort of way from their perches. Incredibly agile waiters twinkled to and fro with tall glasses of beer, and cheese that was served with little heaps of paprika, brilliant vermilion patches, round the rim of the plate. The leader of the nigger orchestra, on the platform, frenziedly threw his drumsticks into the air, and flung back his head so that a thousand high lights flashed on to the responsive shine of his complexion. A comic opera figure in the uniform of the Budapest police strode in, whispered a mysterious, sinister command to the manager, strode all round the room twice, strewing uneasiness, and then out again, having pulled Mitzi Vronje appreciatively by the ear. . . .

And at the table in the corner, an Englishman talked about his farm. And he talked, not wildly, but rather as one who can only just remember that he had felt wildly, long ago:

“They—*bored* me, those letters of Kate. She wrote such long letters, and always the same. And took it for granted that I cared as much as I had when I left England. She didn’t think that War might alter a man, and imprisonment. That shell, too, bursting so near—the

one that threw me over—they said it had done no harm—but I don't know. . . . I was restless, and sleeping badly—The farm *bored* me, I tell you. And I had to keep it from Kate that I was bored. And when I went back to it, when the War was over, I should have to pretend and pretend. . . . I dreaded going back.”

“And you didn't.”

“No. What did it matter, after all? It was prospering without me. Kate had said that she could run it—Well, she could carry on with running it. She's as good a farmer as I, perhaps better. And anyway, I only meant not to go back at once. Not quite at once. When I was released. . . . I can remember how I longed for this sort of thing—” he indicated the Papagaly's very un-Saxon glitter of exuberant high spirits. “And, in another way, I wanted peace, too, the kind I've got over the river—that quiet room and that quiet street. No obligation to act the most difficult part in the world, to act the self that you were once, and that somebody—your sister—still trustfully thinks you are. I was released—and I drifted out here—and married Marishka. We were very happy for a year. I don't know what Kate thought when I didn't turn up. She may think I'm dead.”

“You never wrote?”

“No. What does it matter?”

Mitzi Vronje's turn was over, and her attentive audience at the tables were now able to froth over on to the dancing floor, and spill their limbs in a variety of hilarious fox-trots. Mitzi herself, strolling round behind the oval of tables, took a whimsical fancy to the lean

face of Nicholas Broome, and invited him to dance with her. She found him a nimble, albeit an absent-minded partner, for he paid her the same compliment in seven different languages, and related at least half-a-dozen contradictory fantasies relating to himself and his business in Budapest. And all the while his brain was working furiously; and his eyes were dreamy, for he had heard The Call.

. . . The Call, to Nick, meant that some affair which was not his business at all, was very drastically wrong and would have to be put right. The condition of Garth Boldicott presented itself to him as quite the most urgent problem that had as yet come his way. Here was a man who was dead and yet not dead; fatally content and yet not happy; with no work to do, and not even the activity to resent inaction. Here was a brother who had failed his sister who had been loyal to him; and had little love for a son who adored him. Here was a life being squandered, and a soul frozen alive—

And all that this man said in response to expostulation, was a weary: "What *does* it matter?"

The queer part of it was, reflected Broome, that you did not blame him. There had been a strong reaction of that queer, intangible sort, for which the War had been so often responsible. Cramped to inaction for over two years in an enemy prison-camp, he had not responded, normally and brightly, by a burst of energy the instant he had been set free, by bounding back to work on his fields again. Something had . . . gone sick; and like a dog who nibbles the grass that his instincts tell him he needs for his ultimate cure, he went questing down

into Central Europe, down the Danube. . . . Romance?—Ah, well, the Papagaly at Budapest . . . as good as any other form of it, if that was what he felt he wanted.

And then another hard shock, when Marishka died. And this time the poor devil did not care to rally. He stayed where he was. . . . What *does* it matter?

The sister, too, Kate, she had been in her tenderness the worst of all fools, the kind that abounded during the War: she had only sent him the good news. Oh, of course, her motives had been conspicuously unselfish, heroic even. "Garth mustn't be upset or worried by my letters; it's bad enough for him, out there. I must send him only pleasant thoughts"—and so she went doggedly on, overstressing prosperity, suppressing the undoubted fact that this morning the old cow broke her leg, and that it hadn't rained for forty days. . . . Oh, *fool*, Kate! Where was the appeal of a farm in which all went sleekly without a blemish or accident for twenty-four hours of each day and night?

Among the jostled couples on the dancing floor, Nick saw in a hollow scooped out for his momentary vision, a woman sitting solitary at a lamplit table in a farmhouse kitchen, adding up accounts—then impatiently thrusting them aside, bitter with the unending fruitlessness of toil and toil for the sake of a brother who had not even cared enough to come back. A very loney woman, Kate Boldicott. Well—she had had to pay, was doubtless paying still for her well-meant blunder.

. . . The vision was quenched; the music stopped; and then, in response to frantic clappings and stamping

of feet, the nigger lifted his drumsticks, and the band crashed into the refrain again:

"I—love my—Chili bom-bom. . . ."

"Dance with me again," demanded Mitzi Vronje, in German, frankly liking him.

. . . "Operate at once!" More than ever before in his vagabond career, Nick felt now, towards Garth Boldicott, all the personal responsibility, the urgency of a surgeon suddenly happening against a bad case which has been neglected too long. What could he do, to rouse the patient from stupor; to remove the numbing obstruction, whatever it was. A dead man, a man without roots and without occupation, should be, if still possible, skilfully goaded to life again; but not just be suffered to remain as he was, rotting away the warm vitality of all that came in contact with him. . . . Laddie, for instance—

Laddie! Nick had got his clue! He need not rack his inventive powers any further. It sprang, in answer to perplexity, straight from recollection of Laddie's confession that day: "He doesn't take any notice of me when I'm all right. . . . He was quite different when I had fever, twice, and once when I'd been fighting. . . ."

To an astute psychologist—and Broome was arrogant about his divination of the hearts and minds of others—one hint was enough. When he had handed over his gamine partner to a whole row of clamorous rivals, and walked gently across to the table in the corner, he knew exactly what experiment he meant to try on the unconscious Garth Boldicott.

It did not take five minutes to shift their talk back again to the subject of farms. Then Nick remarked that he rather wondered at the son of a Devon farmer going to Somerset soil, when he might have remained where it was more familiar.

"Cornwall, not Somerset, I said," was Garth's uninterested correction.

"*Cornwall?* Then why did I imagine—Now I know Cornwall well. I've stayed there with friends— Just whereabouts is your farm?"

"The north coast, but a short way inland, of course. Place called St. Bennett, not far from Padstow. Why, what is it?" for his companion was staring at him with that sort of—of *dawning* look:

"*There?*" he muttered. And "Boldicott's. . . . Of course, I remember now—"

"Remember what?" sharply.

And Nick replied, in confusion: "Nothing. Yes, I have stayed in that part, but—all farms look alike to a townsman, you know. Don't they?" It was obvious that he was nervous, and wanted to change the subject. He began to speak of Mitzi Vronje's dancing.

Boldicott interrupted with: "You *do* know the farm. What is it you're not telling me?"

And then Nick, to put it colloquially, fairly let him have it. And he could be amazingly eloquent when he chose; when, as now, he was fighting for what amounted to as much as a man's very reason and a small boy's happiness:

Boldicott's was a ruined farm. It was standing empty; had been untenanted for over a year. The last man in

there had been a fellow who had fallen sick and had to move down south; and before that had been an Irish family, shiftless, muddled, lazy. They'd find it a job to get a tenant now, in the state it was in; fields gone fallow and tall with weeds; and trampled over by invading cattle; broken gates, rust and mildew on the farm implements, out of date now, in many cases; rotting fences; sheds and outhouses tumbling down for want of repairs in time, after heavy weather. Tiles gone from the roof of the farmhouse itself, and a crop of old tin cans in the front garden—

"When did Kate . . . die?" asked Kate's brother, in a low voice. But he was listening, right enough, to the wry news of his property; his old apathy had dropped away from him like a shed cloak.

"*Die?* She's enjoying herself in London. Do you blame her?—after you had . . . ratted. How long did you suppose your sister would sit there, waiting, and for your sake running for all she was worth a concern that had been your joint affair, so that you should find nothing changed when you came back? You talked of 'reaction'? Women suffer from it, too, sometimes. Even an incredibly loyal, hard-working—idiot of a sister, is human, sometimes. When there was no word, no sign from you, nor sight of you, after all her hard years, why, she had a 'reaction,' too. The farm suddenly sickened her, and life on the farm, and work on the farm. She just didn't care what became of it; let it to the first tenant who offered, good or bad. She was aching for pleasure, then, greedy for her share of all that London had hoarded of pleasure, during the War years.

Women fly to contrast—not less than men. She was free, now, of responsibility. Waiting and waiting and waiting and waiting again; and then one smiting disappointment—and free. I hope—” added Nick, viciously, for he had so projected himself into the emotional part of Kate Boldicott, that he genuinely, for the moment, believed in her behaviour, “And I hope that she’s having a thundering good time!”

There was no question any more of Garth Boldicott being a frozen man: “She had no right to leave the farm, like that!” he cried, angrily.

“You have no right to resent it, surely?”

“Babbling her wrongs to the whole neighbourhood—”

“She babbled to no one—” Those at the tables near by were grinning, wondering what the two Englishmen were having a row about? Englishmen so rarely became excited in public. “I simply heard that the farm belonged to a brother and sister, and had once been a paying concern; that he hadn’t come back from the War—killed, probably—and that she had found it too much for her, single-handed; and had let it, and gone to London. The rest I put together, easily enough, from what you told me. Your fields are a disgrace—scroil and bindweed all over them; and thistles, too, seedy stuff that blows about—so that the other farmers round there don’t like it: they call it ‘dirty land.’ ”

This was the crisis—and enough. Broome, secretly rejoicing, saw that he need add no more. The owner of Boldicott’s had flushed dark red, and his hand had clenched on the edge of the table. “‘Dirty land’ . . .” he repeated, huskily. And after a few more moments’

brooding, rose and pushed back his chair. *His* property, his land, once cherished, toiled over and made fertile by him, now a by-word in the neighbourhood, a menace to other farmers, jeered at, but deplored as a scandal—"Dirty land" . . . his? He walked out of the Papagaly, his head bent. The sting of shame was unendurable. Thank heaven, however, there was still time to show them! If the farm needed him as much as that—

"I'm starting for England to-morrow, with Laddie," he flung over his shoulder at Nick Broome, who had paid and followed him out.

Nick smiled, happily, into the darkness.

.

They did not start on the following morning for England, because of the need for procuring passports, and like formalities. But the interim gave time for Laddie's leg to heal completely—a wildly excited Laddie, with two wildly excited legs!—And four days later they did indeed start for England, Broome with them, partly because he might as well return to England as go on anywhere else, and partly because of the beginning of uneasiness. . . .

They went by boat as far as Vienna. Garth Boldcott, a queerly transformed being, eager and impatient, paced the deck with Broome, and talked amorously, and with incessant ambition, of his farm, and what he meant to do there, and how the reported damage could be most quickly retrieved; what original ideas, carried into effect, would yield the best results; planting sugar-beet, for instance? On a large scale, as they did in Hungary. Why not? What did Broome think of it? As anyway

the meadows had gone to waste, it would not be like creating a vast disturbance of any existing state of things.

"I've got a capital of a few thousands that I'm prepared to sink in it. Oh, not much—but Laddie and I have been able to live on it up till now . . ." but, except for this one reference, he altogether ignored his lethargic past, his drowsy existence in Budapest, as though a different man, who did not concern him, had been wizarded fast into a spell and left there, still dreaming.

His attitude to Laddie, too, had altered. His son, now, seemed woven in with his land. Both belonged to him; his farm would have to be hauled into order, for his son's inheritance. And both—certainly his conscience was broad awake and scared—both had been sufferers from his neglect. He unrolled, for Laddie's benefit, picture after picture of intimate daily life on an English farm; and the boy listened, entranced.

Broome, a man with a gift for meddling, was at first very well pleased with the results of his interference. Laddie's face, alone, was glorious repayment. And nothing was so gratifying to Nick as when his psychological deductions, like a successful conjuring trick, brought the rabbit out of the top-hat. He had lied, freely and with fine dramatic power, about the abandoned state of Boldicott's farm—which, needless to say, lay in a part of Cornwall which he had never even visited within fifty miles!—along the same principles that would make you reasonably sure of animating a sluggish mother by such a casual untruth as that her child is sitting on the

railway lines at the level crossing and the Down Express is almost due. Laddie's confession had subtly pointed out to him that he could rely on awakening Boldicott's paternal instincts for any of his property that might happen to be down on its luck, shabby and despised. His narration of boredom at the effect of Kate's letters relating only to the smugness, sleekness and jaunty independence of Boldicott's, corroborated this idea. And it was the right idea. . . . Here they were, on their way back to England.

But on the second day of the journey, as they drew nearer to the lie and inevitable exposure of the lie, Nick, as already hinted, began to grow uneasy.

By the fourth day he was positively terrified, for their fourth day after leaving Budapest saw them in the train between Waterloo and Padstow. They had travelled through without a break.

Garth Boldicott was a trifle astonished when his companion suggested accompanying them as far as Cornwall, as far as St. Bennetts. But Nick, though he would rather have fled to the farthest ends of Scotland, than be present at the moment when Boldicott should first stare at the farm's undoubted orderliness and prosperity, yet was no shirker. And he deemed it his job to be present, to explain, and to cope with the consequences. What he hoped, most desperately, was for a reconciliation between Kate and Garth, between brother and sister, once his despotic agency had brought them face to face. And then a softened Garth might forgive the farm for not being in a state of deplorable ruin, and might forgive Nick for his inspired warbling of a Song With-

out Facts. And if not—Oh, well, damn it, there might be the dickens of a row; but nothing could be worse, for Laddie nor for Boldicott himself, than that stuffy little quiet room in old Buda. . . . Once the sap begins to rise in the tree, the tree cannot wither and rot into dry wood.

.
Boldicott had told the driver of the small car they had hired at Padstow, to set them down at the moor cross-roads, and to return to the station for their luggage.

“You remember this old cross?” to Nick Broome; who answered hastily: “Yes! Oh, yes. . . . Well! That’s to say—yes!”

“We can walk from here. Only about half a mile along the lane. And there used to be a gap which gives us a good view of the house and several of the fields round it.” And he added—with a would-be reckless laugh: “I might as well get my first shock and punishment over at once.” And once again and for the thousandth time, he thought: “‘Dirty land?’ I’ll show ’em!”

“Yes,” agreed Nicholas Broome, woodenly. Neat farm buildings, probably in excellent repair, fields of waving grain, more fields of cattle contentedly browsing; trimmed hedges and well-drained ditches—no doubt but that it *would* be a shock!

“—Here’s the gap!” announced the exile, suddenly, in a queer throaty voice. And Laddie pranced, exultantly, on the white, dusty road between the tall banks.

A rusty rail had been laid across the gap. Garth Boldicott leant his arms on it, and gazed at his home

and property. Laddie, close up to him, gazed too; so did Nick. . . .

“ ‘M yes,” muttered the man who had gone away, at last, after a profound silence. “Rather worse, even, than I thought. But we’ll get it right in time. Come along, Lad!” Forgetting Broome, they moved together towards the forlorn-looking grey stone building with its mildewed “To Let” board creaking at the broken-down front gate.

Nick Broome, with the dazed sense of one who has been saved by the unforeseen working of a miracle, lurched along the lane towards a cluster of houses and shops which he guessed to be St. Bennetts. The old woman at the Post Office, fortunately of the garrulous and not the austere type, told him that she had been there for three-and-twenty years. Told him that she well remembered Miss Kate up tu Boldicott’s, so she did. Miss Kate had carried on fine and done well by the farm, all through the War, but she did lose heart when at the end of it her brother ’e didn’t never come back, though none o’ them here-along had rightly heard that he was dead, neither. All in a rush like, t’dear maid had gone off to London, ess, to live there, an’ had sent word afterwards, it might be two years or three, that she was married, so she was, tu a rich man in t’City.

As fur farm, it had been let first tu a man as didn’t rightly unnerstand farming, an’ then tu a man as took sick an’ died, an’ then tu one as was too venturesome, my dear heart, yes! But for the last eighteen months there it had stood empty and rotting away and the good land wasted, so that it war a shame to see. And Farmer

Trevorrick up to Church Town, said it was dirty land, an' that the law could—

“Thank you,” said Nick Broome, rather breathlessly. And walked rapidly away.

. . . YES, he was wonderful! He was even more wonderful than he had hitherto imagined himself. Not only did he get his psychology unerringly right, but he simply could not get it wrong, even when he thought he was just inventing! even with somebody whom he had neither seen nor known, like Kate Boldicott. He, Nicholas Broome, stood still on the strip of green common, paralysed, unable to go on, for sheer wonder at himself!

“QUIET CORNER”

“QUIET CORNER”

I WAS trying to find space in my address-book to squeeze in yet one more name, but it was no good. The book had been in use for over ten years, and was as packed as the inside of an omnibus in the rush hour of a rainy day.

Alison said to me, firmly, looking over my shoulder: “It’s no good, Brian, you must surrender, and start a new one. Here you are!” And from a drawer in her desk she produced, like a conjurer’s trick, a most unfriendly looking new address-book, clean and glazed and empty. “I’ve been keeping it in reserve for months,” she added, a little maliciously, well knowing my nonchalant habit of saying “yes” to her suggestions, and then postponing action indefinitely. “And now, as it’s a rainy afternoon . . .”

So I sat down and started copying out old addresses into the new book. It is one of the most sentimental occupations in the world. . . . Some of your friends are dead; with some you have quarrelled; from others you have just drifted apart. Alison was unsympathetic when I sprayed her, like a fountain, with my thin sad wailings from the past.

“I’m going to leave you alone,” she announced, presently; “all alone, to cry, and sing ‘It’s only a beautiful

picture!’ Otherwise, you’ll never get the job done, with all these reminiscences!”

A few of the names were dead wood in my memory. Uncanny, to stare at two or three lines in your own handwriting and to have forgotten why they are there and of what you were thinking at the time when you jotted them down.

One, in particular:

Ferdinand Moore,
c/o George Agnew, Esq.,
Rest Harrow,
Chesham.

Who the devil was Ferdinand Moore, Rest Harrow, Chesham? How the devil did he get into my address-book? The name awoke just a faint tremor of remembrance; the address none at all. I had no associations with Chesham, nor with George Agnew . . . Dead wood . . .

Therefore I did not copy it into my new address-book. Nevertheless, I continued hopefully to wring my mind as one wrings a cloth to extract one more drop of moisture. . . . Ferdinand Moore? . . . Ferdinand? . . . Perversely, I resented his presence among so many pleasant people whom I had known quite well. The entry was not recent, of course; I have said already that the book dated back over ten years. The unknown Mr. Moore was fairly near the beginning of the M’s.

When Alison came in again I asked her casually: “By the way, Alison, d’you happen to know what’s become of old Moore?”

“Do you mean the almanac man?” she asked. “I expect he’s all right. Why?”

“No. Oh, no. I mean Ferdie Moore. Old Ferdie.”

Alison shook her head, and said that she had never heard of him.

“It doesn’t matter.”

. . . But it went on bothering me all the same. To find out exactly who was Ferdinand Moore and how he came to be nestling so snugly in my old address-book grew to be a sort of obsession in my mind. It nagged on and on.

Finally, to get rid of it, I wrote to Ferdinand Moore. The letter was, I think, quite ingenious. I wrote that it was so long since we had met; and how had he fared since those days? Was he still doing the same thing? Had he moved, or did he still live in the same old place? I asked him how all the others were, and I wrote that I would so much like to have some news of him, for I often thought of him—“although we have drifted so far apart!”

This seemed to me safe. Of course, he might have been a plumber employed by me at some crisis or other, and in that case he would be surprised to get my lines of tender inquiry. But I tested the name of Ferdinand Moore several times on my subconscious, and the reactions were not plumber-like. Then, without confessing to Alison the absurd lengths to which maddened curiosity had driven me, I posted the letter . . . and waited.

By the time the answer came—which was about ten days later—other incidents had rushed up, and I had

nearly forgotten again about the whole business. As is my habit on receiving a letter in an unfamiliar handwriting, I turned first to the signature: "F. Carlyon Moore." Curiosity leapt up again, exultant. My foolish little mystery was about to be solved. I turned to the first page. There, on top, was the address. And that at once solved it, without further probing. . . .

"Quiet Corner,"

Wonniton Sands,

S. Devon.

Of course! of course! . . . "Quiet Corner." . . .
That was Ferdinand Moore!

. . . Alison and I had not been married long, and her parents were to stay with us for their summer holiday, together with her young sister, Kathleen. We had spent some time already looking for a suitable house, and Alison had said to me: "Brian, darling, we can't possibly live even for two months in a house called 'Quiet Corner.' 'Quiet Corner!' Think of it!" I certainly did think it rather unnecessarily wayward and sweet and intimate; nevertheless, furnished houses by the sea were none too easy to get during July and August, and I liked the photograph of the garden which the owner enclosed when answering our advertisement. And there were the right number of bedrooms.

So Alison and I went down, not unhopefully, to look at it. It really was a charming old house. "Rambling" is the word used to describe this type of building. Distinctly, it rambled. It stood on the edge of a village, about a mile from the sea. And there were practically no pictures on the walls. This was greatly in its favour.

Only, in the drawing-room, one rather charming landscape in needlework.

The garden—again to use an overworked phrase—was “tangled.” It was rather badly tangled, and nearly everything was in the spot where you least expected it. Nevertheless, I liked Dorothy Perkins in the orchard, and the herbaceous border of potatoes growing up against the old red wall.

Ferdinand Moore showed us round himself. He said that he expected his wife back at any minute and apologised almost too much, especially in the larders and pantries and at the linen cupboard. He said she knew so much more than he did about these matters. He certainly seemed to be very dependent upon his wife; his own contacts with the world were a little vague and precious.

He was tall and thin and he stooped. But his complexion was not the parchment hue of a scholar, as one rather expected; on the contrary, it was reddish, and clashed with the sandy red of his hair. He had near-sighted blue eyes, with spectacles, and his nose was high and conceited. To tell the truth, I did not care much for Ferdinand Moore, yet he seemed very anxious not only that we should rent his house, but that we should be happy and comfortable in it. The bedroom which Alison loved so much he said belonged to his wife.

“She keeps it very tidy!”

For it had a fresh, untenanted look which was rather more as though it were waiting for someone to step into it than of someone who had just stepped out. . . . “She can’t bear disorder; can’t bear it! can’t bear it!” re-

peated Mr. Moore emphatically. And yet the rest of the house was not by any means tidy. We were, however, definitely attracted, and told him that it suited us, and that we would probably take it, but would let him know for certain in two or three days.

"Can't you possibly wait any longer, now? A few minutes, only? My wife—"

But we had a train to catch. Just at the door, Alison, who is sometimes twisted by strange caprices, looked back at him and remarked: '*You* named this house, didn't you, Mr. Moore? *You*, not your wife?'

He appeared gratified. "Indeed, yes. *I* named it. 'Quiet Corner.' . . . My idea of a little haven, Mrs. Perry. No wrangling, no strife, no disharmony, no angry voices. Just a quiet corner. I tried 'Quiet Haven' at first, but then it occurred to me that 'Corner' gave it quaintness."

"Yes," Alison agreed, very seriously. "Corners *are* quaint. I've noticed it. Well, good-bye, Mr. Moore. Thank you so much. We'll write."

"*What* a beast!" she exclaimed, as soon as we were out of his hearing. She was very little more than twenty then, and rushed to swift conclusions. "My word, I'm sorry for his wife!"

"Oh, he's not so bad—" I was six years older, and therefore, no doubt, six years more tolerant. "Not exactly lovable, but—"

"Lovable? He's leavable!"

WE took the house. It really was just what we wanted, and the furniture luckily did not include Mr. Moore

himself. Alison wrote to Mrs. Moore once, making housewifely enquiries about plate and linen and the like. And Mr. Moore replied for his wife, that she was so sorry to have missed us, having arrived shortly after we had left; and that now, most unfortunately, she had been called away again to nurse her sister, but expected to be at the house to welcome us on arrival, and to show and explain all that was necessary.

But when we arrived at “Quiet Corner,” Alison and I, her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Lane, and Kathleen, her young sister, the house was solitary. We had the keys—the agent’s boy had met us at the station of the town three miles away; but, shambling and uncouth, he had nothing to say to us, either about “Quiet Corner” or its owners. Lying on the hall table was a note, again from Ferdinand Moore. He said that he and his wife regretted deeply that they had been prevented from welcoming us in person—his wife especially, as she had not yet had the pleasure, etc., but that she hoped we should find everything in full order; if we had to communicate with him, his address was c/o George Agnew, Esq., Rest Harrow, Chesham.

It was Kathleen who first gave voice to the strangely uneasy feeling which possessed us all with regard to “Quiet Corner” and Mr. Ferdinand Moore. She plumped it out thoughtlessly in front of the old people, which was a mistake, because Mrs. Lane was inclined to be tremulous once the aspens of her fancy had been set shaking. And it was mainly on her account that we had wanted this tranquil holiday, for she had had a hard time nursing her husband after an operation.

Kathleen said: "I don't believe there *is* a Mrs. Moore. I believe that awful man you told us about has made her up."

"Don't be an ass, Kathleen. One can't make up a wife!"

"I don't see why one can't. You've never seen her, have you, Brian?"

"No, but—"

"And Alison didn't get a letter from her, did she? Even when she wrote to her direct? Well, then," Kathleen finished triumphantly, "there you are!" And she added in her off-hand way: "I expect he murdered her, you know, and doesn't want to tell anyone."

Poor Mrs. Lane began to flutter. I soothed her as well as I could, and waited till I was alone with Alison before bringing up the subject again.

"The queer part of it is," said Alison, "that I believe Kathleen's right. No, not about the murder, of course; but I could swear to it that there has been no mistress of this house for some time now. Oh, I can't tell you how I know. Little things, millions of them! Call it woman's intuition if you like; it's common sense really. After all, every intimate object we touch and use belonging to other people is bound to tell something of its history."

My own instincts tallied with hers, but I would not admit too quickly that young Kathleen could be right about anything. Why, I argued, should a man, if he had no wife, insist upon her existence over and over again, and all the time in that nervous, emphatic sort of way? . . . "For it's not likely that we should have

refused to take the house simply because there wasn't a Mrs. Moore. There's nothing disgraceful in being a widower. But he gave me a sensation as though his wife—sort of imminent . . . if we could only have waited two minutes longer. . . .”

Alison nodded. “Yes. Yes. That's just it, Brian. He over-stressed her. Don't say anything more in front of mother. As you say, it doesn't really matter to us whether there ever was a Mrs. Ferdinand Moore or not!”

BUT it mattered to the extent of having us out of the house in just over a week. It is a short way from murder to a ghost . . . and the less we had seen of a flesh-and-blood Mrs. Moore the more sinister swelled the convictions of her troubled wraith. She was all over that house. The weather was bad, and we had to huddle round a fire. And were glad of the excuse for huddling.

When you begin to make pretexts to ask someone to go upstairs with you, or hold a lamp while you fetch Granny's shawl, you are lost. And Kathleen, from whom one would have expected a bolder spirit, quaked even more than the rest of the party. We were unhappily conscious of something ominously unquiet in “Quiet Corner”—even before rumours and whisperings inevitably filtered through, via the tradesmen of the village and the servants whom we had brought along.

There *had* been a Mrs. Moore. . . . Yes, a nice lady. . . . But that was more than a couple of years ago. . . . Nobody liked Mr. Ferdinand Moore. . . . And then—something happened; nobody was quite clear about it. . . . They had gone away, he and she

—or was it that he had gone first and she had followed? Or the other way round? Well, anyhow, he had come back again alone, looking—*queer*.

“And that’s how my uncle remembers it, though he’s not grocer here any more, but moved to our other branch at Lyme. But Mr. Moore was always on about his wife coming back, expecting her at any moment, having her room cleared out for her, making excuses, till . . . What was one to think? Yes, indeed, he had once said that Mrs. Moore had been with him for the last fortnight and only just gone away again. . . . And how was *that*, if you please, when none of the neighbours nor villagers had noticed her comings and goings none of that time? Surprised, he seemed to be, and nobody quite knew—nobody liked to say—but there was ugly talk drifting about! In fact—”

In fact, the village believed, like Kathleen, that Mrs. Moore had been murdered by Mr. Moore, buried probably in the garden on a moonless night, and was still to be seen by them as had eyes to see. . . . And, thank goodness, it was others as had to live in the house!

Our servants were not superhuman, and it was natural that they should catch infection from the *macabre* atmosphere surrounding “Quiet Corner.” They began to dither. Poor old Mrs. Lane was, of course, utterly miserable. My father-in-law and I tried our best to hearten up things by a scoffing male attitude towards ghosts and hauntings, but I confess quite simply that I went sweating cold every time a board creaked. And Alison was always snatching at my hand or rubbing

against my arm—and she was not by nature a clinging creature.

Finally, one night, Kathleen screamed—and rushed in to us with some crazy, incoherent description of the ghost she had actually seen. . . . Yes, it must have been Mrs. Moore, standing white and silent in front of the linen cupboard, which was in Kathleen’s room. No, not moving. “She—it—had its back to me. The door swung open, and—oh, Alison. . . .” Kathleen collapsed into gasping sobs. “C-c-counting the towels!” she stammered. “I saw her. Let’s go! Let’s go! It was awful! Ghastly! Let’s go to-morrow!”

“Counting the towels” was funny, but Kathleen’s frenzy was not in the least humorous, and nothing in the world would induce her to be reticent about her experience the next morning. Mrs. Lane vowed she would not stop another night in the house, and so we all packed up and went away, and took refuge at a pleasant rowdy hotel at Ilfracombe, leaving “Quiet Corner” to the dead wife of Ferdinand Moore. . . .

EIGHT years ago. Much has happened to all of us since then. No wonder I had forgotten. And now I read Ferdinand Moore’s letter:

Dear Sir,—You will be sorry to hear that my husband has been dead now for over three years. I do not recognise your name, so I expect that you were a friend of his during the time after I left him and went to live at Bristol, where I started an industry for reviving old forms of needlework pictures. I went back to live at “Quiet Corner” directly after poor Ferdinand died.

Your letter was forwarded to me from Chesham, where my husband had friends. If there is anything more I could let you know, please tell me.

Yours sincerely,

F. CARLYON MOORE.

I meditated a while. . . . Then I called Alison, and told her about it. And we both rocked with laughter. Seen from this distance, the inconvenience forgotten, it was rather funny to have been scared away from a perfectly good holiday by the ghost of a lady who, all the while, had been successfully running an industry for old needlework in Bristol.

Kathleen must have been distinctly overwrought that night. . . .

"But what I still can't understand, Alison, is the insane behaviour of the man himself. Why did the fellow keep on and on pretending that his wife was there, or nearly there, and with him all the time? Of course everyone was bound to suspect him!"

Alison smiled—rather oddly, I thought. "I understand the late Mr. Moore perfectly now," she mused. "Though he certainly was rather a freak!"

"Oh, you understand him perfectly, do you?"

"Brian, dear, would you like people to say about you that you were . . . leavable? Nothing wrong with you, but just somehow your wife went away because she didn't want to stop?"

"Better, surely, than for people to say I was a murderer."

"Ferdinand Moore didn't think so. He was a vain man."

THE ROAD

THE ROAD

I

THIS TIME," the Cavalliere reassured himself, "this time nothing will prevent me from telling them about it. At first I will remonstrate with dignity; and then, if they argue, I will put my fist down, and say that nothing, nothing, but nothing is sufficient excuse for what they have done and for what they do. And then, having made myself clear, I will go away."

But the Cavalliere Roméo de la Torre had worked himself up into exactly the same state before, and unfortunately without result. His English tenants at Santa Justinia—they were so friendly, so oblivious of having done wrong, so exasperatingly innocent of any except the friendliest intention in his visit. Even when he arrived with a heavy scowl darkening his blue eyes—for he had the fairness and tawny-gold hair that is fairly common among Northern Italians—they welcomed him heartily; and he could not help responding to their heartiness, for it was in his nature to be polite, to clasp his hands, to bow and deprecate, thanking them shyly a thousand times over when they rushed forward with a cocktail for him, when they dashed about to get cigarettes, matches, the most comfortable armchair. . . . He simply could not help saying: "No—but please—I disturb—no, no, but thank you very much—yes,

aw-ful-ly na-eece—but I beg you. . . .” And by the time all the preliminary writhing and rocking was over, it was too late to begin his row, and he had to go away again.

Sometimes he even dimly suspected that they might be doing it all on purpose, guessing his intention in coming up; but indeed he over-estimated their sense of premonition. The Dawkins family were not subtle, and they greeted their youthful landlord in this robust fashion because that was their natural style; and besides, it amused the younger ones to watch the elaborate spiral of his deprecations. But it did not occur to them for one instant that he could possibly have climbed the hill from his house to theirs in order to make a row. For what the deuce was there to make a row about? Certainly he had pleaded with them more than once not to drive heavy traffic over his road after rainfall; pointing out at the same time, in a frenzy of admiration for nature, how far more picturesque was the mule-track, even for walking. . . . “And besides, you see,” the Cavalliere had urged, “my road it is not yet completed, finished. Wait—presently I have men in; they work on it. I have engage old Beppo for half a day next Wednesday, and you see—he will make it awful-ly na-eece. But until then. . . .”

“Old Beppo, for half a day?” interrupted Mr. Dawkins, boisterously. “Why, my boy, what’s the good of that? What you need on that road’s a steam-roller!”

At once, de la Torre’s soul winced and shot away from the fatal suggestion, as a lizard, when prodded, will dart into the nearest crevice of the hot wall. A

steam-roller. . . . Dio! But would they *never* understand? How often must he explain that here in Italy a steam-roller costs money, good money, beautiful money! It cannot be hired for less than a week, and the minimum charge is two hundred and fifty lire a day. A steam-roller! Body of Bacchus! Let these English tenants be not so careless with their clumsy feet and their clumsy carriages all over the road, and up and down it, and to and fro, and there will be no need for a steam-roller!

Steam-roller! . . .

But while, volubly, he scolded and shrilled and explained, twisted his shoulder and worked his arm, he was suffering such an agony of internal conflict as would have amazed kind, fat Mrs. Dawkins, or kind, blunt Mr. Dawkins, or any of the noisy, unimaginative younger members of the Dawkins tribe; for the road, the private road, that swooped round in a wide bend from his villa beside the lake, to theirs, and zig-zagged still farther up the hill—this road was his love and his mistress and his pride. When he denied it a steam-roller, his refusal was no less than a betrayal; and the Cavalliere knew it. For indeed, his road badly needed a steam-roller passed over the ridges of its loose and broken surface; and these English were always rubbing it in, in the bluff and tactless way of their nation. “But a steam-roller costa too much!” cried the Cavalliere passionately to the blue sky above him; and he knelt and tried to smooth down a rut with his hands; and he picked up a big, jagged stone, and cast it down the hill. There! Was not that better? Why, yes, it was a beautiful road.

. . . A length of satin. . . . A miracle. It was *his* road! His private road!

It is not given to many men to own a road before they are twenty-two; and the Cavalliere, who was still a boy, felt, the moment he saw it, all of a boy's sudden devotion and over-vehement sense of property. Before inheriting, a few months ago, the little de la Torre estate on the shores of one of the smaller Italian lakes, he had never even visited his uncle. A family feud between two brothers accounted for that; feud typical of their race; typical, even, of Roméo's name. . . . He was by birth a Venetian. His father had laughed incredulously when the young dandy of gondola and palazzo had, after inspection of his inheritance, written home to announce his firm intention of actually—yes, actually *living* there, on Lago Justinia, and of cultivating the maize and peaches and Indian corn which grew abundantly on the surrounding slopes.

"*That* will not endure," said Roméo's papa, slashing at the air with prophetic forefinger. "It is an affair of love which keeps him there now. And love passes. . . ."

It was, indeed, an affair of love; though Roméo's papa would have dismissed as a lunatic any messenger attempting to convince him that the only rival to the daughter-in-law he was carefully selecting for his son's twenty-fifth birthday, was a road, a winding road, a road of earth and loose stones and precarious ditches and hillocks, mud and ruts and ridges.

But in Roméo de la Torre, the parallel absorption of wresting a profit out of the cultivation of his few

thousand square metres of hill-side, and thus proudly justifying his new career to his family in Venice, met and clashed with his idol and his devotion. And, so far, shrewdness had won. A steam-roller? "One must not rob oneself," argued the Cavalliere, as he zealously gathered in his harvests.

And the road, from a material point of view, was good enough for its purpose. It could carry, quite adequately, the carts that lurched and jolted up and down, filled with manure or market produce. Why therefore need he spend any of his still too slim profits on making it level and smooth and polished? You have to spend money on a road before it is even adequate, and large sums of money before it is peerless. This road of the de la Torre property was all rocks and earth; and on the hill side of it, it ran down into a deep ditch; and on the side where it dropped to the lake, it bulged loosely over a tumbled wall; and the surface was rugged, and deeply wrinkled by wheel-marks, and every now and then it clustered into stony hillocks, and then sagged into holes, and meandered on again. About a hundred yards farther on from the house which the Dawkins family had rented for five years from Roméo de la Torre's late uncle, a proceeding which left the disgusted new master quite helpless, it had merged half-heartedly from a road into a path . . . and then its spirit failed again, and it decided to become a mere track through a bog; and finally it squelched away into utter nothingness.

The trouble with the Dawkins family, who were hopelessly utilitarian, was this: that to them a road was

something to be used, something on which you went from one place to another. In very dry weather, their callousness did not matter; but this spring had been unusually rainy, and the ground was sodden most of the time. And in spite of that, in spite of what one might have expected to be his more gentle, reverent and humane instincts, Captain Bryant obstinately drove up and down it, or at any rate up it, every day of his life, in a hired vettura, sometimes with two horses.

Captain Bryant had been staying with the Dawkins family for the last three months. He was supposed to be "a crock"; that is to say, he had been damaged in the War, and his heart had suffered. Therefore he drove. "If I walk up that beastly mule-track," he was wont to explain laboriously to his friends, "I can't get my old breath. . . ." And he said the same again to-day, when the Cavalliere came up to protest indignantly about the deep scars that the wheels of the carriage from the town had last night inflicted on the road.

For he actually had managed, in spite of the usual rush of welcome and offers of drink, to utter some slight complaint—though it was not the outburst of rage which he had intended. He had intended to deliver an ultimatum; instead of which: "You must forgive me that I come, but if you do not drive, it would be better after long rains. . . . The road—it suffers—I have the expense—I—Pardon me! Ah, thank you, thank you! Merci! Grazie mille! No—it is too much—I do not drink the half. . . . Ah, grazie, grazie! No, I will not sit—I disturb—Pardon! . . ."

"I'm afraid I have to drive up," repeated Captain

Bryant, whom the Dawkins family called Phil. "It's my old breath, you see!" And he rapped himself in the region where his breath might reasonably be supposed to abide.

The Cavalliere looked sympathetic, but inwardly he was unbelieving. With the intolerance of his extreme youth, he argued that Captain Bryant was a man, and men could walk; or else Captain Bryant was a seeck-man—and seeck-men stayed at home.

And here the Dawkins family, had they guessed his reflections, might have agreed with him. They knew well enough that "old Phil" really was a crock, and was far from putting it on. Then why the dickens need he go down every day of his life, and have his rotten little drink at that rotten little café beside the lake, and then drive home again, whatever the weather, and however rotten he felt? It seemed a piffling sort of idea. It wasn't as though he bathed, or did anything really cheery. Being so ill, he was a jolly sight better at home, sitting quietly in the garden. He could mix himself a drink up here at home, every bit as good, and a damn sight better, than that muck they served out to you down at the Grande Café Europa e Santa Justinia.

And neither the Cavalliere, who was also a little boy at his games, nor the Dawkins family, who played games only officially, with balls and bats and racquets and clubs, could understand that Phil Bryant was playing the café-game, and deriving from it immense satisfaction and spiritual swagger. No good telling them about it, of course. You played it best alone! But he would not abandon it—not though it rained in streams, not

though the road was soaked with mud, and he had to drive both forwards and backwards, carving it into yet deeper ruts and wrinkles; not though the Cavalliere begged him not to take a carriage during, or directly after, wet weather. . . . "Why shouldn't I?" thought Phil. "A road's meant to be used!" "Why must he?" reflected Roméo de la Torre. "He could walk—or he could sit and drink at home. . . ."

II

THE Cavalliere was leaning over his garden wall, and watching, with an expression of satisfied ferocity on his fair chubby face, some impressive work of construction that was going on just below. The labourers were *his* men, and they were using *his* wood and *his* time, being paid with *his* money, to erect a heavy cross-barred gate across *his* road. For these were his orders, flung out at the climax of boyish bad temper when the very next day after his last interview with the Dawkins family and their house-party—Phil was their house-party!—he had once again seen Captain Bryant driving solemnly past, down the road . . . and, a couple of hours later, back again, the wheels of the carriage ruthlessly pressing down the exquisite gloss of its surface. "Basta!" screamed the Cavalliere. "Basta! It is enough!" And such was the energy of his annoyance, combined with the delightful realisation of his adult power as owner of the property, that within a few hours, all of his men, who should have been at work among the maize and Indian corn, making good soldi for their young master, were commanded to relinquish whatever

they were doing, and instead to devote themselves to throwing up this mighty barrier across the private road just outside the Cavalliere's house, a few yards along from where it forked off the main road which looped the lake.

Roméo de la Torre chuckled sardonically thinking of the immense bolt and padlock which he had just purchased. Every time, now, that they wanted to go up or down, those English on top of the hill, they would have to ask permission for the gates to be unlocked. Naturally, the permission could not be withheld; they, as his tenants, had the right to use the road; but still, it would be mightily inconvenient for them, inconvenient and humiliating. Aha! he would teach them not to be so light-hearted with their carriages during rainy weather! He would teach them who was lord and overmaster here—teach them with stout wood and iron! Let them use the mule-track more, these fat and lazy ones! They would be surprised, Dawkeens and his house-party, when they saw the gate which he, a full-sized man, the Cavalliere de la Torre, had built for the protection of his frail love and lady!

And indeed they were both surprised and bewildered. They could not understand *why* the fellow had done it, knowing nothing whatever of his obsession, nor of the terrific scenes and arguments which he confidently supposed he had had with them on this matter, but which, in reality, had happened only in his own brain. They found it difficult to believe that a man should have spent hard cash on anything quite so solid or quite so futile as this new gate.

"Must have cost him a pretty penny!" said Mr. Dawkins, in conclave with his sons and his daughter and his wife, and Phil Bryant. "He's not old enough to be running this place without advice. Y'know, there's no *sense* in the things he does. Nobody uses that road except him and us, and he knows well enough we've got a right to it; so who's he trying to keep out?"

"Perhaps he's got a vendetta with someone," suggested Joan Dawkins, brightly. "He might be afraid they'll steal in at night and murder him. People do, in Italy, don't they?"

"Well, but he keeps it locked during the day, when he's working out on the hill himself. Infernal nuisance!" grumbled Mr. Dawkins. "Always having to ask for the key, and waiting about until one gets it, or until he's fetched, or until his servant comes. He's got to give us a key, of course."

"Can't get away from the law," put in Captain Bryant, with a ponderous nod. "I once knew a—"

"Oh, yes," assented fat Mrs. Dawkins, hastily, for she grew bored with Phil's stories that began with: "I once knew a . . ." "Of course he'll have to give us a key. We must ask him for it. You ask him, Father."

"*You* can ask him," retorted her husband. "It comes better from a woman."

"It isn't a question of coming better," quoth Phil again. "You can't get away from the law. I once . . ."

"Bertie could ask him," said Joan. "They're the same age. I believe he likes Bertie the best of us."

As a matter of fact, Joan was wrong. He liked Bertie the least of them, if a least were possible.

Bertie said: "Cecil, you'll be seeing him some time to-day. You can ask him then. I'm playing tennis."

"Ground's too wet," said Cecil. "*You* ask him. What's the objection? He's always polite enough when he comes up here."

But although they all agreed that they must have a key to the gate, and that the Cavalliere had no legal nor moral right to withhold it, and that the request was extremely reasonable, and that their landlord was the very soul of courtesy, yet they all seemed to shy, with a queer dislike, from the job of actually approaching him on the subject. They were, indeed, fathoms away from actually guessing all the poetry and the passion of the Italian boy's infatuation. To them, he was simply a bit fussy about his rotten old road; and Joan, who was the wag of the party, made them all shout with laughter, by accusing Bertie of having dropped a pencil on it, dimpling its smoothness. But they smelt the fanatic somewhere, somehow; and being well-balanced people themselves, the suggestion upset their tranquillity.

"I'll tell you what!" exclaimed Bertie. "Sonia's coming to-morrow, isn't she? Well, we'll turn young Sonia on to him!"

They all agreed in chorus that young Sonia should be turned on. The gate was as good as unlocked already. They had immense faith in Sonia.

Phil Bryant slowly blushed. He did everything slowly. He had apparently met Sonia once, and: "I tell you what, Dawkins," he remarked with emphasis, "that girl simply sends my old pulse up to a hundred-and-twelve.

And that's not impossible, mark you! I once knew a fellow . . ."

"Raining again?" cried Mrs. Dawkins. "Well, well! Raining again!"

"АНА!" gloated Roméo. "The gate has taught them! They have been taught. Benissimo!"

And beyond the heavy bars of wood, the road wound sacrosanct; and the sun shone down upon its emptiness. . . .

His road. . . . In his dreams, in his etherealised conception of it, he did not see it being used at all, not solidly and sordidly for carts, driven by peasants, and piled high with a precarious load of stuff for buying and selling. But he envisioned it as a road whose own beauty was its sole use. Other roads were for all men, but this one he owned, and no one might use it save with his permission. How white it was! And how gold in the sunset! How gracefully it coiled and swayed, subtly bending its form to the shape of the hill! In his vision of it, it was a road without end, even as it was a road without use. It ran on and on, over the hills, and down into the valleys. . . .

And sometimes, again, it appeared to him as one of the great roads of history; and through half-closed eyes he could see Hannibal and his elephants treading their way along it; or great armies, wearing coats of burnished steel; or processions in which women were gowned or furred for some exquisite revelry, and men were tall and laughing, and their cloaks swung proudly from their shoulders. And though they passed along his

road, and over it, these horses and carriages and elephants, yet they never dented it, nor left any mark. For it seemed rather as though they were treading without weight, over taut velvet. . . . A golden haze drifted down and enveloped them, and, when it cleared, the road was once more shining and empty. Perhaps that was how he loved it best, for then it seemed most his.

.

It did not begin to rain again until after dinner the following day.

But then it rained with tropical violence, like flung spears upon the ground. "What a night for Sonia to arrive!" said Mrs. Dawkins. "Are you going to walk to the station, Bertie? Is Cecil going, too? Dear, dear, you *will* both get wet!"

The mule-track was a running rivulet, and the trees added their dripping quota from overhead. But Bertie and Cecil were wearing their oilskins, and did not really mind. They were glad Sonia was coming to stay with them. Sonia was very popular with the Dawkins family.

"Bet you the train'll be late, on a night like this!"

Bertie answered; "I wonder the lights haven't failed yet."

And at that exact moment the lights did fail, all over the village, and in every house. The lakeside inhabitants were resigned to this happening, whenever the rain was especially heavy.

Sonia's train, due at nine-forty-five, proudly drew its burden of carriages into the pitch-black station at eleven-ten.

"You darlings!" cried Sonia, leaping on to the plat-

form and into the welcoming arms of Bertie and Cecil. "*What* a night! You can't even see how much prettier I've grown. Yes, I've got masses of luggage. It's all up at the back, somewhere—or was it in front? I forget. I say, I thought the sun always shone in Italy?"

"Not usually after 11 P. M.!" laughed Bertie. "But it's been simply foul weather this spring. No bathing yet, and the roads are in a horrid mess."

They chartered a carriage, and piled most of Sonia's lighter luggage on to it, as well as Sonia herself, leaving the heavy trunks to follow the next day. There was no room for Bertie and Cecil, so they followed quickly on foot, quite forgetting, in the excitement of the arrival, to warn either the driver or Sonia herself of the absurd impediment to progress at the foot of the hill.

Emmanuelo pulled up his horses with a jerk, and Sonia was thrown, with painful suddenness, against the corner of her hat-box. Emmanuelo came round to the door of the carriage, and talked and gesticulated for several moments, with shouts of amusement. He had a very strong sense of the comical. Sonia only knew that it was very dark, that the roof of the carriage was leaking, so that splashes of cold rain dripped upon her shoulders; that she was hungry and thirsty and tired, and wanted to get home, and that her hunger was not of the kind that could be satisfied even by the rich garlic contained in the breath of an Italian coachman. Why didn't the man go on?

The misunderstanding continued for several moments before he was able to enlighten her by going forward to shake the gate and rattle the padlock. The girl peered

out, and could dimly see the obstruction. How queer of the Dawkins boys to have said nothing! What was she to do, alone in a soaked, black world? Could the gate be locked? She alighted herself and tried it impatiently. Yes, it was locked. Then she saw, a little way above it, the shadowy outline of a house. Perhaps that was a sort of lodge, and they had the key there. Her play of gesture was very supple, so that she was able to indicate to Emmanuelo her brilliant notion, that he should arouse the inmates of the house and ask them to open the gate, that she and her luggage might drive through.

Emmanuelo shrugged his shoulders. He had no illusion about the lodginess of Cavalliere de la Torre's residence in relation to the Dawkins' hired villa on top of the hill; but still, he groped his way to the front door, and began banging and shouting, which is the Italian equivalent for a decorous knock. Presently, after what seemed to Sonia, peering anxiously from the murky inside of the carriage, a very long interval, the shutters of an upper window were flung back, and a voice cried angrily: "Cosa vuole? What do you want?"

Emmanuelo responded with a beseeching flood, which she interpreted as a plea for the gate to be opened. She began to get furious. Why couldn't that chattering booby up there come down quickly and release her from her predicament? Sonia was used to the service of men.

"Can you speak English?" she called out. "I say, hurry up and come down and open this gate, will you? I've been waiting about for hours. Or if you're undressed already, chuck us down the key."

—And then Roméo fairly let himself go! Partly in English, partly in Italian, with oaths and with cries to heaven, he made clear to this impertinent person—he could not see her, it was too dark; but she was obviously English, and a visitor to the Dawkins family, so she partook of their sins—that he had no intention of coming down at this time of night, to open any gate whatsoever. It was late; he had been asleep. Why could not people arrive at a reasonable time? It was not his business if the trains were late—Dio, no! Nor would he throw down the key, nor allow the gate to be opened. If she had politely requested, perhaps—but her imperious summons worked upon him like wax upon a flame. He imagined that she was despising him as a mere boy. He writhed and he spluttered. She could walk up the mule-track, yes—or she could stay below. Ecco!

“Don’t be silly and rude,” retorted Sonia, “even if it is your gate. I don’t care whose gate it is. I can’t possibly walk up. I’ve got a whole lot of luggage here in the carriage.”

And this was the climax, and the end of altercation; for if de la Torre had been unwilling to allow a lightly weighted carriage to roll up over the spongy, squelching surface of his road, how much less likely would he be, to allow a carriage weighted down with heavy luggage?

“No, no, no, no—eempossible! Via, Emmanuelo! Go! I care not how the luggage gets up. Basta!”

The shutters were slammed to again. The walls of the house were blank and silent. The gate remained locked.

. . . "*Beast!*" cried Sonia.

And then Bertie and Cecil joined her, and she poured out her wrongs to them, and they heartily abused Roméo de la Torre and his road and his padlocks. Emmanuelo and Bertie and Cecil between them loaded themselves miserably with Sonia's luggage; and Sonia herself picked up her handbag and her sunshade, and stepped daintily out of her haven into the rain, and shuddered with disgust as she felt the flowing mule-track lapping round her suède shoes and dainty silk ankles.

. . . And they all plodded slowly upwards.

III

"THIS time," fumed the Cavalliere, the next morning, "nothing, *nothing* will prevent me from telling them about it! I will make them a devil-of-a-row!" What—to wake him at midnight—well, nearly midnight, drag him out of bed, and, without apology, demand that he should come down and open the gate, so that a carriage with a heavy load of luggage and visitors might drag its devastating wounds across the delicate bloom of his road? And in the rain, too! "Body of Bacchus!" Raging, the Cavalliere went up the mule-track. This time, no drinks, no fellowship, no slappings on the back should propitiate him. The Dawkins family should hear at last what he thought of them. Trembling with the intensity of his desire to vent his wrath and his grievance, he did not wait for the answer to his rap, but hurled himself into the hall, and on to the now sunlit verandah. . . .

Then—

. . . “Scusi, scusi!” murmured Roméo de la Torre.

Swifter than the fall of an apple from a tree, he had fallen in love.

. . . He was rapt. He was inarticulate. Anger melted from him, and slipped away like snow in the scorching rays of the sun. His limbs became boneless; his tongue loosely knotted a few incoherent phrases, such as: “I did not know—but pardon. . . . Scusi! Mille pardons—but thank you—I beg—no, please. De la Torre, de la Torre,” introducing himself with several jerky bows. “If I had known—if I can do—Please, please. . . .”

He was in a pitiful condition.

She was very tall, this girl, and very slim and golden; like a beautiful Antinous, with her short fair hair tumbling over her forehead and round her cheeks, curling a little; her gay narrow eyes were set slant-wise above her cheeks’ seductive bloom, faint as the powdering on a freshly gathered nectarine. Accepting Roméo as a contemporary, she was not in the least shy, but at once became frank and confidential with him, as though to her no silly boundaries existed between strangers and old friends. She said that her name was Sonia, and that she had arrived last night. . . .

And the Cavalliere collapsed.

“So—it was you?” he stammered. Life became a black horror. It was this divine creature whom he had insulted, whom he had compelled to walk, carrying her luggage, up the steep mule-track, on a dark rainy night. Did destiny loathe him, to have prompted his one childish display of bad manners and bad temper to burst

forth at his very first encounter with Sonia? A meeting which should have been all flowers and prancings and laboured compliments? Had he but known—had he but known. . . .

And suddenly he hated the road, his road, for having been the cause of his wild act of self-destruction.

He began to apologise for his conduct of the night before. It was a marvellous performance; Sonia would not have missed it for worlds. She compared it afterwards to the liquid fall of syrup from a spoon, sticky but transparent, undulating and curvetting into a wonderful complication of arabesques. An English youth would have said: "Hell! if I'd known what you were *like* . . ." and left it at that. Sonia was amused. Sonia was cruel. She allowed the Cavalliere to writhe in abasement for quite a long time, before, metaphorically speaking, she gave him a shake and set him on his feet again.

She was glad, for several reasons, to see the effect she had produced. The least of these reasons, however, was revenge for his treatment of her the night before. Sonia had a forgiving nature, and the memory of her spoilt shoes did not rankle. But then the Dawkins family had challenged her to use her power, and charm away that exasperating gate at the foot of the hill: "Bet you can't do it, Sonia. He's simply a sulky, obstinate *baby* about anything that affects his precious road; always afraid that we may leave a footprint on it, and that he'll have to pay to get it repaired!"—which was an aspect of the matter wholly unfair to the tall young visionary and idealist, who had loved his road as some

men love the mountain peaks, and some men their country, and some their collections of etchings or Venetian glass, and some lovers their brides.

Sonia was enough of a schoolgirl to take a dare. Moreover, she had, as previously stated, her reasons, and also her one special and private reason, for not desiring a stout gate stretched across the road at the foot of the hill. So that the next few days were, to the Cavalliere, a dazzle of torment mingled with ecstasy. Now she laughed; now she teased; now she was casual or disdainful; then again quick with her friendship, with her sidelong caressing glances, her open-hearted avowals of all that Sonia wanted for Sonia, to make Sonia's life pleasant. At moments, he thought that she singled him out especially for her favour; but then again he became despondent, and noticed her equally debonair liking for Cecil, for Bertie, for Phil Bryant—nay, for Joan, or Mrs. Dawkins. Pretty Sonia kept her affection spinning so impartially from one to another, that almost before you ran to pick it up, the next candidate had a temporary hold of it.

But he was most jealous of Phil; because of Phil's superiority in age and military experience, and because of all the hours that Sonia spent in sitting with him, at one of the two little rickety tin tables outside the Grande Café di Europa e Santa Justinia, sipping coloured liquids, and allowing him eternal leisure in which to expand from that opening: "I once knew a fellow who . . .", so brusquely discouraged in the Dawkins' home circle.

Phil was very, very happy. He had scarcely any

need to dwell carefully in the extreme centre of his illusion, without stepping beyond its limits. The illusion had wider boundaries, now, and was of stouter and firmer stuff altogether. Continental life? Why, Sonia *was* continental life, all its gaiety and chatter and evanescence, as she sat there with her sunshade—"I like that sunshade," said Phil, every time he saw it; "it's rather a jolly colour. What colour, exactly, would you call those sort of flowers and whirligigs on it? No—wait—don't tell me! Let me see. . . . *Don't* tell me!" he implored, almost passionately. "I'm one of those chaps who like to find things out for themselves. Now *I* should call those flowers, a sort of ripe-raspberry colour. . . ." He was triumphant at this discovery. A white silk sunshade, with pale green stripes, and the little flowers and whirligigs were ripe-raspberry colour. These were the symbols. His dream had materialised at last—a pretty girl sitting opposite him, bright blue skies—yes, even the weather had cleared at last, and was warm and benign. . . . What matter that his old heart and his old lungs seemed rather more dicky every day?

"I like this sort of lazy, cosmopolitan life, don't you?" said Phil to Sonia. "Sitting out here with the lake in front, you know, and being able to have your drink comfortably, and sort of watch the people at the same time. You can't do it in England. They don't know how; but it sort of suits *me*."

And then, confidentially leaning forward, his eyes round and solemn and a little surprised, he told her, in slow simple phrases, about the café game. Of course,

he did not call it that. But this was how he played it:

You began by calling yourself a cosmopolitan. You went on to pretend that you were a man of leisure, and that you liked to sit, slowly sipping your liqueur, at one of the innumerable little green tables on the promenade outside a café, and to watch the crowds go by. It was so interesting and amusing to do this, that you made a habit of it. The crowds looked so gay, and the sun was shining, and the lake was very blue, and the striped canvas awnings and umbrellas over the tables, so bright and jaunty; and you were part of it, too, and at the same time a tolerant spectator. . . . There was always something amusing to be observed in a crowd. You called for another liqueur. . . . Presently, perhaps, you became a well-known figure. . . . You would be pointed out . . . as thus, for instance: "Yes, he always comes down at this time, and sits there, and has his two drinks. Then he gets up and pays, and drives home." It was all so—so . . . so *cosmopolitan*! And Captain Philip Carfax Bryant, who had been in sundry dangerous expeditions and campaigns the whole world over, and was now in the last stages of his endurance and vitality, felt indeed that he might die, that his old breath might really fail and give out at last, if he could not go every day down to the one café in the dull little town, and sit at one of the two rickety tables which stood outside, order his drinks, with a pernickety air, and then lean back to watch the two or three stray people who occasionally straggled past. These were the stage properties of his illusion; these were his toys,

that he could build up into that glamorous fabric of gaiety and continental life. . . .

So he played his café game!

"I know—oh, I *do* know!" cried Sonia, ceasing, for the moment, to be a minx. "And it wouldn't be a bit the same, for instance, if you sometimes missed out a day, or went to a different café, or had three drinks instead of two. Or if you played dominoes, instead of watching the passers-by, or read the *Corriere della Sera*. *They* can, but not you. It must all have the same clicking movements, like a little brightly-coloured mechanical toy. Even my sunshade . . ."

But she noticed that he coughed a lot during his narration. And she mentioned this to the Cavalliere, next time they were alone together: "Why do you always scowl so," she asked, "when you open the gates for poor old Phil to drive up to the house with me?"

"Why should he drive?" expostulated Phil's rival, unleashing his hot resentment. "He is a man. A man can walk."

"But he's ill!" cried Sonia.

"If he is a seeck-man, he can stay at home. I do not think he is so seeck, or he would not want to go every day, every day, every day, down to the café."

The girl's eyes were a little misty. "I don't believe you're old enough to understand . . ." she began. Then quickly altered her tactics: "I wonder," coaxingly, "if you'd be nice—really nice and generous, and lend me—me, you know; it needn't be the others!—another key to your gate? It's an awfully fine gate, and I think it

looks splendid just where you've had it built—so commanding and feudal, with you looking down on it from your house, like a baron from your castle; fortifications and battlements and things,” went on Sonia, winding him softly in a web of words and admiration, crooning his critical faculty to sleep. “But you know, it does please poor old Phil when I go down with him to the town, and have drinks; and he really seems to me not quite so well as he was, even a week ago. He ought to drive both ways. If you lent me a key, then you and I could arrange it just between ourselves.”

Thus, that rogue Sonia included him into the delicious atmosphere of a secret shared between them. Not for the *Famiglia-Dawkeens* was her preference, so her tone conveyed; and not for poor old Phil either, though she was sorry for him; but for the lordly young *Cavaliere*, who held keys and commanded gates. He was conscious of a tremulous sense that his fortune and his luck were very near their zenith; and that by one supreme flourish, one moment of grand display, Sonia would be his! He gave her a look suffused with meaning. . . . “Wait!” he said. “Ah, yes, you are right. Awful-ly na-eece! But wait. . . .”

And when she drove back from the town with Phil, the day after: “By Jove!” exclaimed Phil. “What’s that mad youngster doing now?”

For Roméo de la Torre was hewing down his gate.

He was bare-throated; sleeves rolled up; wearing leather breeches. . . . His appearance that of a gallant enough knight to be performing a votive act. He swung the axe himself—no henchman should be allowed to

share in the splendid sacrifice. Already most of the wood lay heaped and scattered on the road about him.

"You will excuse," he said, pausing, his weapon of destruction still uplifted, his gesture dramatic, his courtesy profound: "You will excuse, but I fear that just this day the carriage cannot pass. If it will not incommode you to walk—*Mille scusi!* A thousand pardons! After to-day—" he spread his arms wide—"the road is clear!"

"But what's the idea?" enquired Phil. "What are you cutting it down for?"

It was the cue the Cavalliere required. Not for him, the little simple services of devotion which are performed silently, and in the dark. He was a Latin; and he believed in the *beau geste*. Sonia was looking at him, and:

"I had need of firewood!" replied Roméo de la Torre magnificently.

IV

THE peroration of his gallantry proved too much for the weather. It broke almost at once.

The rain had not been slicing down for more than half-an-hour, when the Cavalliere, sitting in his study, mechanically doing accounts, and at the same time concocting the speech in which he should presently—soon—to-day—ask Sonia to be his wife, was interrupted in his double performance by a most incredible sound, that first blended with the steady drumming upon the roof and against the window-panes . . . then suddenly

swelled to a roar, a great pounding of wheels, the throb of powerful engines, the scream of a horn. . . .

Something long and lean and aluminium flashed past his window, and up the road. . . .

It died away again. Roméo rushed out on to the balcony, just in time to hear the jar and grind of brakes applied too suddenly, as the big 40-120 h.p. racer pulled up with locked wheels, in front of the house on top of the hill.

"How's that for a climber?" cried Dick Kyndersley triumphantly, as Sonia and the Dawkins family, followed more slowly by Captain Bryant, rushed down the garden path to meet him. "I came up that hill, bend and all, at forty, and pulled her up, standing, in ten yards—fifteen, anyway! And on this imitation cart-track you call a road, too! My God's she's a thoroughbred! Only just bought her, at Milan. I got rid of my twelve-horse Trumpeter—" And indeed, that seemed to be the only trumpeter that Dick *had* got rid of; for he bragged on excitedly about his new purchase, and all that she could accomplish, his eyes seeking Sonia all the time, claiming her approbation.

—Little boys at their games. . . .

Sonia had been sorry for Phil, and amused by Roméo de la Torre. But she sparkled on Dick. Dick was undoubtedly the conqueror. She gloried in being the girl chosen to sit beside him, while he recklessly tore about the country in that crouching, rushing monster, which was at once his exacting idol and his toy. And almighty Phaethon! how he showed off! How he went up and down that hill—"There was a gate in the way, before,"

remarked Sonia; "but I had it pulled down for you, directly you wrote you were coming!")—never slackening speed for the bend, turning and reversing when he reached the summit, until the yielding road was cut into as many strips as a dish of soft macaroni. Dick had no consideration but for his own splendour and achievement; and indeed, it never occurred to him that consideration was required. He was very confident and very handsome, and he had a new car; and Sonia—Sonia was so gay, and so pretty, and so entirely fearless. . . . They had simply a top-hole time!

And after a few days' lingering at Santa Justinia, she consented to let him drive her to Florence, where she was to join her people. It was all right, because they were practically engaged.

"Oh, it's all *right*!" said Phil Bryant gloomily, explaining this to Roméo de la Torre, as they sat together at one of the two ricketty tin tables, outside the Grande Café di Europa e Santa Justinia. The boy had inexplicably taken to joining him there, regularly, of late, since Sonia had deserted them both; and they had had drinks together, and talked disparagingly of the new arrival in the Famiglia-Dawkeens' house-party; in spite of the discrepancy of their years, they each drew a queer, melancholy comfort from this companionship in affliction.

"You say it is all right, yes," replied the Cavalliere, equally gloomily. "But I do not know what this means—this 'practically engaged'?" And he added, with a flash of sardonic jesting: "I should call it rather, I, *unpractically* engaged! Here in Italy we are practical,

yes. Our betrothals, they are serious, they are meant to last. I do *not* think he is awful-ly na-eece, this English fellow with his big car!"

"Oh, he's all *right!*" said Phil again, loyal to his nation, and detesting Dick Kyndersley. "Shall we go now?" The lake was grey, and a cool, drizzling rain spotted the water. He did not seem to fancy his drink this morning; too sweet. His old cough was bothering him. . . . And he remembered gaiety, and deep blue skies, and a white silk parasol with green stripes and raspberry-coloured sort of flowers on it, outside a cosmopolitan café. . . .

"I will follow you later," Roméo said. "I must see a man about a business, and I prefer to walk. But I will call you a carriage, yes? It is bad for what you call your 'old heart,' to walk up that mule-track." He touched Phil Bryant on the shoulder, in an odd mood of protective tenderness. . . . A seeck man. . . . And he himself was so strong. . . .

.

The Cavalliere was just about to turn in at the gate of his house, when he heard again that odious hum and throb, familiar now, from the top of the hill. . . . It swelled into a deafening clamour of engine and wheel and horn, as the great aluminium racer, driven by Dick, Sonia beside him and her luggage piled at the back, flashed at top-speed round the bend, thundered towards him . . . and then reluctantly slowed up, to allow one of his carts to draw to one side. The pause was enough to show him that Sonia was looking more bewitching than ever; enough, too, to allow him to hear Dick re-

mark to her: "Of course, a foul road like this is simply the ruin of a decent car!"

The cart was out of the way. Dick accelerated, and darted past. . . . The pounding died down to a drone, and they were gone.

. . . Roméo de la Torre did not go into his house, after all. As though in a trance, he walked slowly up the road—or what was left of the road. It was his fault. . . . He had suffered it to lie defenceless under the wheels of the enemy, and this was what they had done to it! And yet, for all his sense of soreness, of being deluded and abandoned, his possessions mocked at, he was just beginning to be conscious of a faint gladness that they were once more left to themselves, he and his road. He had deserted his first love, but he could make amends. And he thought he might spare old Beppo for half a day—no, for a whole day, the week after next—no, no, next week, to work on it. . . .

. . . He bent down, and tried, in a futile sort of way, to straighten out a bit of rut with his bare hands.

And, slowly, out of remorse and a longing to prove it by penance, the great decision was born:

"Per'aps—for a week—a steam-roller. . . ."

ROULETTE

ROULETTE

AND I was really your vision of Europa?" breathed Ettarre Patterson, ecstatically, to the poet; "and you were the great white bull?"

He nodded assent. Ambrose Knight never spoke while he could remain silent; a few simple gestures sufficed him; a smile, a shrug, an emphatic downward sweep of the hand. What need for more if you are a famous poet, renowned for the eloquent passion of your verses? For he had been awarded the Grantham Prize for the finest love-poem of the year. "Europa" was his subject; and on hearing from his own lips how she had inspired him, Mrs. Patterson sighed a little, and said "Yes" to his proposal, even though in that one syllable she forfeited a lordly income. Her late husband, George Patterson, had left her four thousand pounds a year; if she married again she was to have four hundred a year and the rest was to pass from one widow to another; to his sister, Mrs. Sophia Marrow.

For eight years, Ettarre, as she loved to be called, coquetted with the idea of combining love and poverty, as often as an offer presented itself, though wisely enough she never yielded to it; but then, until now, no man had exalted her as the heroine of a world-famous poem—Europa!

"Eureka!" cried the ambitious soul of Ettarre, as she

lay in the arms of Ambrose Knight, her Jupiter, her great, white, conquering bull. And indeed, he was an enormous burly person, with thick white hair, and something of a bull's strength in his limbs, and a bull's lack of social chattiness in his reticence. He was sincere in his love for the pretty brown-eyed, brown-haired little creature whose talk bubbled like a silvery stream over a bed of hard round little pebbles:

"What does money matter?" laughed Ettare, now, feeling very transcendental indeed. "I mean—what can money *buy*? What can money *bring*? What can money *hold* that is of any value?"

It had bought, brought, and held for her, hitherto, a most luxurious flat in Regent's Park; an arrogant little Calton coupé; a staff of well-trained servants; and a daily expenditure on her person, her clothes and her comfort, which would easily have kept three fair-sized families for a month. Ettarre could not endure any creases in the sleek satin of her existence; yet without even a qualm or a shudder she contemplated marrying Ambrose Knight, who earned only an uncertain two hundred a year, to add to the four hundred which would be all her husband's posthumous jealousy would leave her.

Ambrose Knight had nothing to say on the subject of money; he never noticed it; he was a real poet.

He kissed Ettarre's permanent wave, and then kissed her very slowly up and down her plump white forearm, with the innocent enjoyment of a boy playing a mouth-organ.

"And now," murmured Ettarre, "you must write another great poem, even greater than 'Europa,' called

‘Europa Afterwards’—No, wait a minute: just ‘Afterwards’ alone, I think!—telling what happened to Europa and her Great White Bull after they eloped together from her father’s kingdom—”

“I’ve often wondered—” quoth Ambrose Knight.

“And meanwhile,” she finished, blissfully snuggling down cheek-by-cheek with sacrifice, “meanwhile, I’ll learn from Sophia—she’s my sister-in-law, you know, such a nice practical woman, and terribly plain!—how to be a poor man’s wife. Ambrose darling, I’ve never, never, *never* felt so rich before!”

THE sensational news of Ettarre Patterson’s engagement scuttled round the circle of those to whom it most vitally mattered like the little roulette ball darting from one runnel to another, and never settling while the disc spins. From Sophia Marrow, that blunt and thrifty woman in rigid black, whose duty perforce had always been economy, and whose watchword: “We can’t afford it, and there’s no more to be said!”—from Sophia, yet without any of the visible flutterings of joy that one might have expected, the news went to Neville, her son, who dashed around with it to Bobbie Seymour, a hard-hearted, red-lipped child who might have sat for the very portrait of that Modern Girl about whom the newspapers argue so disapprovingly. And she, after swiftly calculating just how much of the three-thousand-six-hundred-a-year of Ettarre’s renunciation would remain with Sophia, and how much would be Neville’s property, laughed and accepted him. “We might give it a fling,” she said, “on three thousand. So see to it, Neville,

old thing. Victorian old ladies like your mother would much rather see their sons rich and happy, than be rich and happy themselves!" And these sentiments she repeated to her brother Dan, who scowled, and called his sister a mercenary little rat—then went and lost his temper about it to his friend Dorothy Greenwood, who was engaged to Ettarre's nephew, Harry Blair, her only living relative on her own, not the Patterson, side. And so back to where the news started.

SOPHIA was glad of the news, and Neville was glad, and Bobbie was glad; and Dan was sorry, because he liked young Neville and hated the thought that this money would deliver him for life into Bobbie's clutches. Yet Dorothy was moved to perhaps the greatest gladness of all of them. She had hated the possibility of that inheritance from Ettarre which so long had kept Harry spell-bound and unambitious in Ettarre's service. . . . ("Oh, but we're not in the very least like aunt and nephew. Nothing so stodgy. I adore going about with Harry, and dancing with him. He's just the right height for me, and his Yale Blues are divine. Nowadays, you know, there's no such thing as an aunt") . . . But no hope now for Harry Blair, with Ettarre's fortune surrendered to the Marrows, on the Patterson side of the family. Harry, released from expectation, would be forced to carve his own way, as other young men have done.

Dorothy remembered that offer of a job in Kenya. Dorothy was glad; she had long been in secret revolt against Ettarre's invisible rule. She lived with Ettarre,

in a sort of undefined capacity which was not companion, housekeeper, secretary, nor prospective niece-in-law. Scornfully, but only to Dan—one could talk to Dan!—she called herself Ettarre's "girl-friend." Ettarre's age was seven times seven, and Dorothy's was seven times three—too young for bitter mockery at the situation.

So, head held high, grey eyes alight under the broad brim of her cowboy hat—looking, in fact, as though she had already sighted Kenya on the horizon: hard riding, hard work, open spaces, and no time for the Blues, however Yale, however divine—Dorothy told her fiancé the excellent news, and he said, quietly, "Good!" But his own look was brooding; his look said, "Damn!" Only Dorothy was too tremendously happy to notice it, and over their six o'clock cocktails they made out their first rough list of the equipment they would need on their African adventure.

Then Harry, with a great sheaf of flame-coloured azaleas, and one pure white azalea among them, went to Ettarre and congratulated her, and gave her the flowers, rich with the facile expression of goodness-knows-what. And she said softly:

"Of all things, Harry dear, that I do most appreciate, it is the subtle *beau geste*. It's quite wonderful of you to take my news like this . . ."

The little ivory ball had rattled once around the circle.

SOPHIA MARROW was sitting in front of the fire, idly dreaming. Until her sister-in-law's engagement to Am-

brose Knight, three weeks ago, Sophia had not allowed herself to dream. For seven years she had had an invalid husband, two sons—Roland had been killed in the war—and ludicrously insufficient means, even for everyday affairs. Dreaming was expensive. Moreover, people would have said of Sophia that she had not got it in her. She was one of those whom it is apparently easy to sum up: brisk, downright, practical, energetic, and intolerant, an excellent mother and a satisfactory housekeeper. This was Sophia on the surface. She usually wore black, occasionally dark green—strong, durable materials in a style whereof you sensed a sewing-machine and a little dressmaker in the background. And, of course, her hair was drawn away from her forehead and, with uncompromising fortitude, tightly bundled at the back of her head.

But now . . .

Sophia Marrow, aged forty-eight—for she was actually a year younger than pretty Ettarre—sat in front of the fire, dreaming. The fire was blazing gloriously. She had collected all the cushions in the room to render voluptuous the deep old arm-chair. She was making plans, her lips curved into happy smiles. Her thoughts were luxurious, for they were living at the rate of four thousand a year.

Presently a bell rang, and Ettarre Patterson was shown in. At sight of her sister-in-law, Ettarre uttered a little cry of astonishment:

“Sophia! *You?*”

Sophia glanced lazily up at her, without moving.

“Yes, why not? Who else would it be?”

"*You?*" repeated Ettarre, as though some miracle of transformation had taken place.

She simply could not believe that the strong-minded woman whom she had alternately pitied and respected for so long was now lolling—yes, actually lolling, doing nothing, smoking fat cigarettes of the kind that help meditation—and looking—Sophia was looking—Ettarre hunted for a word to describe the amazing change—blossoming! Yes, that was it; Sophia had blossomed!

"Is it my hair or my dress that so surprises you, Ettarre?"—a strain of mockery in her voice, in the quick lift of her eyebrows.

"You're looking very well. Where did you get it? I like the wave, too; it suits you. Madame Rosina herself couldn't have waved it better."

"Rosina *did* wave it."

"My dear Sophia!"

"My dear Ettarre!"

"She's—she's so expensive!"

"You went to her yourself once a fortnight."

Could it possibly be that Sophia was laughing at her? Ettarre was resigned to being scolded; one must make allowances for anyone who led such a hard, skimping life, poor thing. But to be laughed at, that was a different matter! And by Sophia, in a rest-gown and obviously a model gown at that—a Madeleine et Madeleine. And doing positively nothing at all, and with that extravagant fire. Feebly, Ettarre let drop the rest of her bewildered resentment, and merely remarked:

"It's not natural, from you."

"My dear! How do you know what's natural from me, and what isn't? You never *have* known!" Sophia slewed her head round for an amused scrutiny of her visitor. "You seem changed, yourself, if I may say so, Henrietta. Learning how to be a poor man's wife?" Her gaze flickered down to Ettarre's feet. "And rather overdoing it?" she added, tolerantly.

The remark was justified. It was as though she and Ettarre had, by some witch-work, changed places. Ettarre the gay, the extravagant, the expensive, had ceased to be. She had given up her car, and her walking-shoes were thick-soled caricatures of the normal person's walking-shoe; her stockings were woven silk and wool—mostly wool; wool for Ettarre, for whom the purest silk had been hardly fine and delicate enough! Incredible!

Ettarre could obviously not have rid herself, during the past three weeks of her engagement, of all her brilliant and well-cut plumage, so that the drastic change in her attire was a sheer theatrical pose which deserved exposure. She flushed now, and said quickly, and not without dignity:

"I *was* trying to fit myself to being a good wife to Ambrose; and I don't believe in doing things by halves. It would be quite absurd for me to go on with my hair-waving and face-massage, when I'm going to live on—on six hundred a year. At least, I *was*! And yesterday I tramped for hours looking for a suitable studio in an unfashionable neighbourhood, for love's sake." Her eyes were sparkling with tears.

But Sophia missed the warning in every "was," so heavily stressed.

"Sit down, then, and have a cocktail, and make yourself comfortable. Why a studio? I thought Ambrose was a poet?"

"A cocktail! Really, Sophia! I'll have a cup of tea, if you have such a simple thing in the house nowadays. It doesn't look like it, I must say—all these flowers! And if you'd lived in the world more, the world of creation, I mean, you'd know that poets do live in studios as well as artists. They must have space for their ideas"—vaguely—"and to tramp about! Horizons, you know."

Sophia grinned with a flash of her splendid teeth.

"All right, my dear. Don't get excited. He shall have his horizons, for all I care. After all, his verse is excellent. I think you're very lucky."

"Do you?" in a sudden vindictive spurt. The atmosphere round Ettarre seemed to be trembling and glittering, a-prick with bright stabs and needles. Her hands were clenched in their fat woollen gloves. "Do you? Well, thank you very much for all your congratulations, Sophia. And as it happens, you can take them back. Ambrose is the most selfish man in the world. He doesn't realise all that I've sacrificed for him. If he'd called me 'Europa' a little less, and considered me a little more— It isn't as though I were a pretty toy; I was prepared to inspire him; I told him of one or two little things that I considered wrong and ineffective in his new great work, 'Dance,' and he, great white bull of a

man—yes, exactly like a bull, charging and bellowing—I tell you, I’ve had enough!” Then she burst into tears and said: “Yes, I’ve just broken off my engagement. I shall never marry again, now!”

Sophia remained silent. So certain had she been that riches had fallen on her in a sudden glory, that she had not actually waited for Ettarre’s wedding-day before beginning her royal spending.

Sophia Marrow, though no one suspected her of it, was a romantic. Secretly, she had always been mistress of two castles in Spain; one of them was a hunting-box in the shires; the other, a villa in the South. Before Sophia Patterson had rather unfortunately married Leslie Marrow, and was compelled ever afterwards to restrict her nineteen-year-old impetuosity into the limits of a small house in West Kensington, one maid, one month’s holiday in every year—in fact, when Sophia had still been Miss Patterson of Ridgeway Manor, she and her brother George were accustomed to hunt every season, and to ride all the year round. She had loved riding more than anything else in the world. And now she was forty-eight, and she was going to be rich . . . so she had taken a hunting-box in Rutlandshire for the approaching season and exultantly had gone to the very best tailor in London, to be measured for her habit. The sound of a horn pealed through her dreams, and blended with the music of hounds in full cry . . .

If only Roland had still been alive to share it with her! Roland, who had always counted for so much more than Neville! . . .

And, thinking of Roland, she remembered her other ruined castle in Spain.

Oh, it wasn't fair, it wasn't fair that Ettarre's mere caprice, swaying this way and that, should swing so much along in its wake! That villa in the South—true, the negotiations had not yet been closed in Sophia's favour; she could give it up; she would have to give it up, now that Ettarre had given up Ambrose Knight. It was not for herself, the villa; she preferred more bracing, more vigorous climates. She wished to keep this son of hers alive and immortal; and no small wooden cross on his grave would suffice; for that, no photographs hung in her bedroom; no pathetic lines in the papers once a year: "In loving and ever-living memory of Roland John Marrow, of the Royal Field Artillery, the beloved elder son of Mr. and Mrs. Marrow, who died February 17th, 1919."

Something she needed, more vital, more urgent than that. Roland had not died of wounds; his lungs had been affected by exposure on active service and he had died quite slowly in West Kensington, aching for hot sunshine in his bones . . . "If I had the cash, mater, I'll tell you what I'd like to do: buy a house down in the South somewhere, where the weather's hot and brilliant and lazy, and run it for fellows like myself, without any worry or cost to them. Not a nursing-home, either; just their own place, as many as we could stuff in. That would be worth doing—there are dozens of us, you know, still left over." . . .

. . . And she was going to call it—no, not the con-

ventional "Beau Rivage," or "Miramare," or "Mon Repos," but, fantastically: "Roland's House."

But of all her disappointment, of her wild, surging impatience that anything so brittle, so flimsy as Ettarre should have power to make or break these schemes, Sophia showed nothing. Only her lips set into bitter lines, and her eyes smouldered, and there was an odd rasp in her voice as she said:

"The trappings of poverty really didn't suit you, Henrietta. You'd better go home and order yourself a trousseau to celebrate the fact that you're not getting married."

"THE engagement's off," said Sophia later on to her son Neville.

"Whose? Not—"

"Yes, your Aunt Henrietta's. She came round to me this afternoon, looking like a fool, and told me her young man didn't really understand her."

"So that's that! It'll make a difference with Bobbie."

His mother wisely said no more. She knew well enough that it would make a difference with Bobbie.

"And that's *that!*" said Bobbie, "I'm not going to pretend, Neville."

"No, I didn't suppose you would."

She lifted slender eyebrows artificially trimmed to an arch of astonishment.

"You've got no pretty illusions about your darling Bobbie, have you?"

And then Neville said a queer thing for a modern

young man who rarely went beyond the clipped speech of his contemporaries.

"You're too beloved for me to have any illusions about you."

"For the love of Mike!" exclaimed Bobbie uncomfortably.

Bobbie telephoned to her brother Dan.

Dan went to meet Dorothy Greenwood at Waterloo. She had been away for the week-end; and because big, crowded stations at night-time made her feel lost and desolate, she had suggested that he might meet her train. It was perhaps significant of much, or yet again of nothing at all, that though Harry Blair was her fiancé, she had asked Dan Seymour to meet her. She explained this, casually, wherever it might need explanation, by saying that Dan had a better technique with luggage and taxis.

Taking her suitcase, he strode along with her beside the file of taxis waiting, somnolent, one behind another; and stretching, as it seemed, beyond the gates of Waterloo into eternity.

"You must take the front one, sir."

"Blast!" said Dan; but in high good humour, so that Dorothy asked what had happened to please him so mightily.

"Ettarre's busted her engagement!" he shouted. "Splendid luck for Neville, isn't it? Of course, my little beast of a sister has chucked him. He's a hundred times too good to be eaten alive. Good old Neville! It hurts him to-night, but he'll sing to-morrow."

Only when Dan had finished did he notice by the

wan stream of light from the lamp-post that Dorothy's lips were quivering.

"Oh, my dear, I *am* a bungling ass! I forgot how you felt about this show."

"I want a taxi," whispered Dorothy.

"Can't take this one, sir. Must take the front one."

They trudged wearily onward. Then Dorothy burst out:

"This means that Harry won't take the Kenya job."

"Hasn't he agreed already?"

"Oh, he'll slide out of it!"

He could not bear the handsome young opportunist whom Dorothy Greenwood had promised to marry some day. But how strange and freakish was love in the twentieth century! How well Neville knew Bobbie, and still he loved her! And how well Dorothy knew Harry, and still she loved him!

"I'VE just heard the news from Dorothy"—from Harry, later, to Ettarre, who was so young in her ways that she was much more a friend than an aunt. "Ettarre, darling, I think you're perfectly right to break it off. Your intuitions are simply too marvellous. You'd never have been happy with Knight. Anyone else, yes; but not *you*."

His inflection implied a whole host of sensitive mysteries hidden away by Ettarre from an undiscerning world.

The little ivory ball had rolled twice round the circle.

ETTARRE, on the telephone a week afterwards, babbling away her happiness to her sister-in-law, Sophia:

“My dear, I simply *had* to forgive him! And we’re going to be a million times more to each other than we ever were before. If you could have seen him last night—like a great shining silver-haired Zeus! Yes, that’s what I call him. No, *no!* Not juice. Zeus. *You* know—Jupiter. Honestly, Sophia, sometimes I wonder if you have read anything at all. Of course, I know you haven’t much time; but still, considering your own sister-in-law has been an inspiration for one of the greatest poems—Ask Neville to tell you. He’ll have learnt about it in his Latin class. Zeus was the bull, you see. It’s all very complicated, and some narrow-minded people can’t see that there’s a beautiful lesson in it all. The wedding is to be quite soon. You must teach me how to make puddings; not too heavy for darling Ambrose, because, of course, he’s a poet. I could never love a man who wasn’t a poet. Oh, yes—George, I know! Sophia darling, isn’t it rather tactless of you to remind me of George, just when Ambrose and I— No, no, no! I know you didn’t mean it. Honestly, Sophia, sometimes you say things that make me wonder if you’re jealous of me—with Ambrose, I mean. Men don’t like sardonic women. All right, all *right*, darling! Of course I’m not angry. Poor Ambrose told me he had really suffered during this last week of our quarrel. It’s terrible to see a big man suffer— worse, somehow, the bigger they are. I wonder why, Sophia, don’t you? Well, darling, I had to tell you. I’m sure you’re glad for my sake, *and* for your own. Isn’t it

funny how the prospect of being absolutely right-down poor doesn't appal me a bit? I suppose it's because love gives one that quality of spiritual courage. Well, good-bye, Sophia."

Sophia Marrow, her deep-set eyes darkly glowing, went straight to the writing-table; and drew from the drawer the contract with the house-agent at Nice, with whom she had been negotiating, previous to Ettarre's recently broken and still more recently mended engagement. In firm, almost hilarious, letters she signed the contract pledging herself to buy the large villa at Cap Ferrat, on the Riviera, for their stated price of 120,000,000 francs! "'Roland's House!'" she murmured, as she put the contract into an envelope, stamped and addressed it, and went out herself to send it off safely by registered post. It was raining in West Kensington; but for her the sky was deep Mediterranean blue; yet, at the same time, she felt a wet breeze in her face, and under her the swinging gallop of a horse pounding over wide fields. She thanked her stars that she had not been able to sub-let her winter hunting-box during the last dreadful week of Ettarre's broken engagement. The grey fog was golden again.

She rang up Neville to tell him the good news.

Neville, headlong as his mother, and direfully primitive in his methods of conquering the heart of an infant of Salome, promptly bought a touring Buick two-seater, on a promise of certain payment within the next six weeks; and drove round in it to surprise Bobbie, and take her out to lunch. Within ten minutes of their meeting, he had proposed to her all over again; she had ac-

cepted him; and he at once made her a present of the car, saying in lordly fashion that he would buy another for himself. Thereafter, their lunch together was an idyll.

"Little beast!" growled Dan, for the ninetieth time, when speaking of his sister to Dorothy. "Grabbing little beast! She doesn't even bother to pretend. Snaps him off, hauls him back, and then has the cheek to tell me about it, as though I ought to be proud to be her brother!" Twice he had lost his friend to his sister, and he felt very sore over the whole affair.

He vented some of his contempt and chagrin on Dorothy:

"You're glad, I suppose, about this reconciliation business? Kenya, and all that?"

Dorothy did not answer, but Dan persisted perversely, knowing that he was making himself hateful to her:

"Blair won't be half as pleased as you are, I'm afraid. Dispossession doesn't suit his temperament. He'd rather remain Ettarre's best carpet-boy. It's a bit maddening, how Ettarre shifts and twitches us all about. When father says turn, we all turn!"

"Yes; she manages to get all the fun of a temperamental ramp round, and pays none of the forfeits!"

"Where is she, by the way?" for they were talking in Ettarre's bronze and sea-green sitting-room.

"She's with Ambrose. They're going to be married awfully soon, you know. But here's Harry."

"Oh, God! I'm off." Dan, looking more than usually broad-shouldered and pugnacious, marched out of the room.

Harry entered the room, humming the wedding-march. He smiled sunnily at Dorothy.

"Where's the bride? I've just been lunching with the bridegroom. Amusing fellow, Knight!"

"Your Uncle Ambrose," Dorothy corrected him, with a faint smile; but somehow or other his attitude made her uneasy. He was too serene. If he had growled at his hard luck at thus for the second time being thwarted of his future riches, if he had broken out against the prospect of Kenya and a tough life far away from the civilisation of the London he loved so well, if his manliness had frankly owned to a distaste for manliness in the conventional sense of the word, that would have been Harry's natural self speaking. Dorothy was uneasy. She was glad when Ettarre came in. But her instinct of foreboding still persisted; and she listened with impatience while Ettarre prattled sweetly and self-consciously of womanhood's responsibility.

"I've had enough!" said Dorothy, suddenly rising. And she set down her tea-cup with a rattle, so that it spilt into the saucer.

The remark, on the surface, might have applied to the tea; but Harry and Ettarre both raised their eyebrows at her tone.

Hardly waiting for her exit, Ettarre said:

"Dorothy has all the grand qualities of a pioneer woman. How wise you are, Harry!"

"Yes, almost as wise as Ambrose is foolish!"

A small splutter of surprise from Ettarre. She was not used to anything but flattery from her favourite courtier.

"Ettarre, darling, do you really suppose that you are the sort of flower who will flourish in poor soil?" Rather effectively he dropped his lightly mocking tone, and spoke gravely and affectionately. He painted the most realistic picture of her daily life as it would inevitably be in the future, comparing it with the ease and silken daintiness of its past and present. And he succeeded quite cleverly in dragging in the smell of cauliflower cooking; and drew a film of grime over the walls of a dingy home with Ambrose. Romance shrivelled and wilted while he talked.

Ettarre stared at him, her brown eyes round with horror:

"What am I to do?"

"My dear, can *I* tell you?"

"I can't let down Ambrose. He says I'm at the very source of creation, for him. What should I feel like if he never wrote again?"

"He had written before he met you, hadn't he?"

"Nothing worth while."

"'Europa?' "

"He knew me already, from the distance. I was Europa."

Harry told her, quite clearly and convincingly, with every sort of proof and leaving no room for doubt, that the original of "Europa" was a certain Miss Gilda Hamilton-Blakeney, a small-part actress at the Popularity Theatre.

"And nearly everybody knows it," he added kindly.

THE little ivory roulette ball was not left to rest in the

socket where it had tumbled after its third hectic voyage on the spinning-board. Once again, and immediately, it was sent rocketing and dancing for the fourth time round the circle.

DIRECTLY Sophia Marrow heard that Ettarre had finally and irrevocably broken off her engagement with Ambrose Knight, she dared not pause to survey catastrophe in detail, but threw the news on to Neville, who told Bobbie, who finally and irrevocably dismissed him with her characteristic:

“And that’s that!”

“And that’s that!” said her brother Dan to Dorothy. His tone implied: “And what about you? And what about me?”

“It’s Kenya, all the same, or else—”

A wild hope that after all, in the end, he might possess her blew upon Dan like a wind off the sea. They looked at each other as mariners might look, silently racing for the same harbour.

And then, after dinner, Dorothy went straight to Harry in his rooms. He was re-arranging his etchings, and humming, as was his habit, but not the wedding-march:

*“Jungles and elephants ain’t no use,
Nor fields where the cotton-picker reaps,
Town is the only place to go on the loose,
And you can have Kenya for keeps!”*

“Ettarre isn’t going to marry Ambrose!”

He took her in his arms. She was unresponsive.

"Darling, I know. I understudied Providence. I was the showman; I was the voice of the serpent. And the funny part of it was that I had nothing to do but tell her the absolute truth! It was almost disappointing that the situation left me so little need for invention. You know how I pride myself on the exquisite finish of my lies! Sweetheart, don't look at me, your eyes sombre with reproach, and all that sort of thing. No more Kenya for us! 'All night long he rode by the trackless river without so much as drawing rein.' Not my style, you know. And I can't bear sweltering. Your pal, Dan Seymour, he's a born swelterer. But as for me: 'Aunt Ettarre's Heir, or The Man Who Never Made Good!' featuring Harry Blair and Dorothy Greenwood. The setting will be entirely in the most expensive parts of London."

"How well you talk!" said Dorothy; and repeated, with most delicate precision: "'Aunt Ettarre's Heir,' or 'The Three Broken Engagements!'"

"Oh?" from Harry. "And who are the other two couples?"

"Didn't I tell you? Bobbie Seymour has chucked Neville Marrow again."

Towards midnight, Harry and Ettarre were enjoying supper at the latest and most successful dance club, "The Shoe Horn." People said:

"What pals they are! Not in the least like aunt and nephew!"

"You dance quite too marvellously, Ettarre. We must do this more often." He raised his champagne glass. "Here's luck!"

"Luck!" she echoed; and, impulsively: "Harry, it's a most dreadful confession, but may I be human and natural just because you understand me so well? Harry, I can't help feeling as though I had just come into a lot of money; as though I'd actually twice lost and regained it. And now I'm rich again. In some ways," she mused, admiring the hot sparkle of diamonds crusting her costly shoes, "in some ways, it's been a wonderful June."

A wonderful June, for a lady of forty-nine!

"WELL, Sophia darling, you sent for me, and here I am!"

Ettarre reflected compassionately that poor Sophia really looked terribly haggard. It did not occur to her, however, that she might be in any way responsible for this. To-day, Ettarre was not wearing out-of-date tweeds, clumsy brogues, and a sensible hat for her visit to her sister-in-law. Her new Cardigan suit, pale beige, mocked that brief and incongruous period of shabbiness. The hat—or, rather helmet—folded to the head with an effect of arrested flight, expressed Ettarre's up-soaring mood of lightness and wings.

It was a glorious day, and her low, narrow-hipped Lancia, out for the first time since its purchase the day before, was also flung open to the sunshine. The engine was still seductively purring, because Ettarre had told the chauffeur that she might be bringing Mrs. Marrow out at once for a pleasant drive in Windsor Park.

"Oh," cried Ettarre, flinging her pretty arms above

her head in a dancing, spring-time attitude, "I feel as though I had just been set free from prison!"

Sophia smiled grimly.

"Complimentary to your late betrothed! No, Henrietta; I won't come out now. I'm—I'm worried, and I prefer an indoor confessional."

"Confessional? Sophia, I hope you haven't—you haven't—oh, my dear, you haven't gone and done anything rash or ridiculous, have you? Sophia, you haven't got engaged?"

"No, nor disengaged, nor engaged again, nor disengaged again."

"Just because I've recently gone through a period of very deep heartache," Ettarre retorted, with dignity, "I see no reason to ridicule it."

"It didn't occur to you, did it, that your swayings and upsettings this way and that might be affecting me financially?"

"Oh, finance!" Ettarre's scornful little gesture disposed of finance as sordid and not worth her consideration.

Sophia, exasperated, for she had not slept since the fatal news five days ago, broke out into an explanation that was wilfully brusque:

"I've taken a place in Rutland for the hunting season. The contract is signed. I can't get out of it. Of course, I can't possibly afford it now. There are dozens of smaller bills, and Neville has bought a Buick. He can't sell it again because he's given it to Bobbie Seymour, who isn't the kind of girl that returns presents."

"My *dear!*" cried Ettarre, in amazement; and sat

down plumply. "Hunting! At your age, to be galloping about here and there on horses!"

"I've always liked horses; so did George."

"Yes, indeed, I remember, but—George could afford it."

"I gathered that I should be able to afford it."

"*Hunting!*" Ettarre began to giggle. "Really, I had no idea you were such a rake. Oh, well, I suppose I shall have to take the Rutland place off your hands. I don't hunt myself, but I can give house-parties. There's Colonel Mallard and Boy and John Eastry, and young Robin Wenlock."

Sophia ruthlessly slashed across these attractive imaginings:

"That isn't all."

"You must send me a list of your other debts," very gently from her sister-in-law.

"Quite!" said Sophia. "I mean, thank you. And then—there's this."

And she told Ettarre about the villa she had bought in the South for 120,000,000 francs—"Roland's House." But she did not call it by that name; she would never call it that again.

Ettarre departed in a rosy aura of grave, tender benevolence. After the first shock of hearing the sum of Sophia's liabilities, she had been most understanding, most tactful. For she had taken over the whole scheme; the scheme, the dream, and in anticipation, the gratitude of the invalids—officers, of course, and *such* good-looking men—who would find their strength again at her entire expense in the Palace Soleil.

"Palace in the Sun! Sophia, I'll call it that, I think. It has a sort of healing note about it, don't you agree, that will give those poor fellows confidence?"

Sophia Marrow, left alone, stood for a moment, hands clenched, dark brows drawn together in an intense attempt to control what she was feeling. Then:

"Damn! Damn her! *Damn!*"

She caught up from the mantelpiece a pair of Dresden lovers, which had been Ettarre's last year's Christmas present, and vehemently smashed them against the bars of the empty fireplace.

Then she put her head down on her arms and sobbed.

"Roland's House! Roland's House!"

Yet presently, and by slow degrees, as though peace were softly stealing into the space that surrounded her, she gradually began to feel that though she, personally had been robbed of the good plan, yet the good plan still remained; her ideas would still be carried out, filtering through Ettarre's benevolence instead of her own.

"Roland's House" or "Palace Soleil," what did it matter, provided men were getting well who otherwise would not have been given this chance? One most solid benefit had risen as a magical, a totally and almost humorously irrelevant result of Sophia's blossoming and Ettarre's grand emotional June.

"At her age, too," thought the woman of forty-eight, mercifully able to laugh now. "Gallop about here and there on big white bulls."

ECHO FROM ITHACA

ECHO FROM ITHACA

THE well-known explorer had married beneath her. Luckily for explorers under these circumstances, they are often away from home. Every two or three years Clementina Knox returned, tanned and triumphant, from something that was vaguely known as "The Interior," always to find the little house in South Kensington bright and steadfast as ever, the hearth swept, the Irish wolf-hound, Cormac, baying ecstatically, and her patient mate—Penelope to a modern Ulysses—waiting for her with a smile of rather anxious welcome. The anxiety was because Arthur Reginald Knox knew that sooner or later, after Clementina had shown him her latest trophies, and had decided where these were to be put in the room she called her "den," and after he in his turn, with a deprecating: "Oh, my dear, but that will wait till to-morrow, you're tired, you can't possibly be interested!" had shown her his own achievements in water-colour, in photography, in weaving—after all that, he knew well that she would turn to him with her shrewd tolerant look, and ask him what fresh . . . suitors he had collected, during her absence? Arthur Reginald, his mother would have assured you proudly, had been popular-with-the-ladies ever since he was quite a wee mite. He had always been radiantly good-looking; and now, at the age of

forty-two, with his picturesque red-gold hair, his pointed, arrogant beard of the same tint, his curling eyelashes, he was more attractive than ever. Behind the beard and the hair and the eyelashes, he was a simple, affectionate, gregarious soul. . . . And what can be expected when a lonely photographer, with sea-blue eyes, confesses to the most charming of his clientèle that his wife is in "The Interior" again? A flutter of excitement: "Oh, but I've heard of her, of course . . . Clementina Knox? . . . Oh, but she's famous! Is that really your wife? Dear Florizel—" Florizel was his professional name "—how proud you must be of her! And don't you ever *long* to go with her? No, no, I see you can't leave your work. And how do *you* pass the time while she's on her romantic travels? So intrepid of her, I think. The Andes, too! Why, she might meet some of those terrible Anzacs at any moment—Aztecs, I mean!"

"How do *you* pass the time?" . . . And so, of course, he would offer to show the lovely lady his weaving. It was a quaint, unusual hobby, and he did it very beautifully; his ebony hand-loom, too, especially made for him, a present from his wife, invariably raised little cries and screams of delight and interest.

But directly Clementina returned, she scattered Arthur's consolers so effectually that they never returned. And next time she went away, he had to build up his little world from the beginning. Her tolerance was for him, never for them. But there were always fresh clients, fresh springs of sympathy, fresh excitement over his old-world hobby. All the same, on this last

occasion of Clementina's return, Arthur Reginald had discovered in himself a gradual swell of exasperation at her offhand ways; exasperation at the lack of consideration with which she treated his friends, his pretty little friends; exasperation at the callous good-bye which he knew would be in store for him in a few months, directly she grew restless again.

Above all, exasperation whenever he entered her den.

He hated that den. It was so unwomanly and enormous . . . great stuffed beasts; fearful reminders of warfare from all periods and countries; skins and tusks and saddles; a rough-hewn block of stone with Inca markings, from Potosi; and now, worst of the lot, these two statues, gigantic, blank of face, brought from the South Sea island of her recent important discovery; smaller than Easter Island, but likewise containing the same type of stone figures remaining from some ancient tribal worship. They had attracted a crowd of pressmen, wanting to write them up, and to write *her* up, where she sat at her big, workman-looking desk, cigarette ash all over the place. . . . Not a womanly room! lacking even a canary singing in its cage!

He noted jealously that the hound Cormac seemed to prefer lying in there.

It is not all fun to be an explorer's husband. And quite suddenly they quarrelled. They had never quarrelled before. It was when Clementina announced at tea-time, over the crumpets, that she would be off again that day week, and that she had been busy collecting her equipment. Something Polar this time, he gathered from her casual explanations. And then Ar-

thur Reginald, who had had rather a nervy day in the studio, photographing an octogenarian, two children, and a white-whiskered colonel—not at all one of his usual days!—Arthur Reginald cried disconsolately: “Off again? Can’t you stop at home and settle down? Settle down like any other—” He stopped, and choked . . . took a mouthful of tea. . . .

Clementina scrutinised him with that quizzical half-smile of hers, not far removed from tenderness, but a hundred thousand miles removed from any more respectful emotion. “Settle down?” she repeated. “Me? Settle down here, in this house? Why, what should I do?”

“You could write your experiences,” stiffly from Arthur. He had been hurt by her inflection of “in this house.” Surely he had made a very happy little home for her? He recalled, wistfully, the indiscriminate enthusiasm of Lady Pleasance Mortimer, of Miss Daphne Peacock, and young Mrs. Frank Wellsham, when he had first shown them over “The Restynge-Place.” Even the name of the house had been invented by him as a subtle compliment to Clementina. Restynge-Place. . . . Well, why the devil couldn’t she rest? Lady Pleasance Mortimer, Mrs. Wellsham, and Miss Daphne Peacock would so gladly have rested there . . . in his arms.

Arthur Reginald glared at his wife, as he repeated: “You could write your experiences.”

“Not I!” laughed the explorer. “Too tame! I’d rather go out and rope in some more!”

“You never think of me, do you?”

She slightly raised her brows. “Like to come along?”

Florizel-Arthur would have hated to come along, and well she knew it. The question were merely another insult.

"You don't know when you're well off!" said Arthur, his repartee sinking to the class from which she had raised him.

Clementina decided to change the subject. They were having tea in the den, and she made some kindly remark about the handsome curtains which were being woven by him to hang across her tall windows, but which were not yet finished. It occurred to Arthur, in his smarting and foolhardy state of mind, that he might try and rouse her jealousy:

"I did finish the curtains for your windows several times while you were away," quoth he, lightly; "but I always gave them to somebody else; somebody who *appreciated* them."

She remained unmoved, even on the subject of "somebody." . . . "By the way, Arthur, I do wish I could come back, for once, and not find you surrounded by a collection of yearning, goggling half-wits with eyes like Pekinese. It lets me down!"

Her husband banged his cup onto the table, and banged out of the house.

. . . He never knew quite how it happened, but presently he found himself rapidly striding round and round the Albert Memorial. In his frenzy, he must have rushed into Kensington Gardens, not noticing that he was being carried along by rage, as usually by intention, to what was secretly his favourite sanctuary; secretly, for he was a little ashamed of his preference.

It was one thing to be mediaeval in his tastes—weaving, and all that!—but quite another to be just old-fashioned. Yet as a small boy, he had been fascinated by the Memorial. It was gold, all gold! and there were so many figures on it. You never came to the end of discovery, if you were a true Memorialite. And even since he was grown-up, in defiance of those who scoffed, Arthur Reginald found a curious sense of peace and rhythm descend upon him, strolling from Asia to Europe, from Europe to America, and from America to Africa, and so round again to the group called Asia. He always had a friendly nod for Asia's elephant, who held up, as to a palmist, an immense foot, the line of love crossed by fate, and dropping a little towards the Mount of Venus. . . . He sympathised with the sick-cow expression on the face of Europa's bull; and the camel was nice, too; and the sheep in the group which represented Agriculture gave him a mellow harvest-and-sunset sort of feeling which he never got from Clementina. And then if you sauntered slowly up to the top flight of steps, circling the base of the memorial, there were Shakespeare and Dante sitting diffidently on the ground at the feet of Homer—which always made Arthur a little indignant, because he thought that Shakespeare should be in the middle! not Dante, certainly, who was just a foreigner, but Shakespeare! . . . There were too many foreigners altogether, in the frieze of celebrities, and one day he meant to write to the papers about it. And at this loyal stage of meditation, Arthur Reginald usually lit another cigarette, and watched benevolently the passings and re-

passings of sight-seers less at home than himself at the Memorial: provincials and Americans. And he thought proudly of the British Empire, and wistfully of Clementina, far away in a less symbolised and more dangerous form of Asia, Africa, America. . . .

But this evening, his mood was neither benevolent nor wistful. He had never before been aware that such tumult of rage existed within him. His heart felt like a clenched fist; his soul was like the wild sunset sinking to the west of Kensington Gardens, behind the dark bulk of the Prince Consort's statue. He even shook his fist at Raphael. His self-respect was in conflagration. . . . It was all so unjust, so unjust! . . . Why couldn't his wife be like other men's wives? Why couldn't his home be like other men's homes? Why had he been so patient, so long-suffering? And when his loneliness had groped for a little help, a little cosiness, a little company in the aching void, even then she had grudged him such harmless consolation. . . . "goggling half-wits with eyes like Pekinese!" . . . Yes, she had come home, time after time, striding, determined, a conqueror laden with pillage, and had shattered the little warm makeshift world that he had built up for himself. She could not even leave him that!

These ruthless modern Amazon women. . . .

Round and round and round the Albert Memorial. . . . Asia, Europe, America, Africa. . . . Africa, America, Europe, Asia. . . . *Exploring?* Bah! What good did exploring ever do anybody? And she had mocked at him and his hand-woven curtains and his clients, his pretty, pretty clients. . . . "Florizel has a

positive genius for the profile!" . . . Arthur thought of his studio, he thought of the many profiles he had posed, delicately lifting the chin with his finger-tips, against a background of dusky clematis velvet. Clementina Knox alone had never sat for him. She had said, abruptly, that if she had to make a show of herself for publicity purposes, she would rather it were to a stranger. . . .

"I'm off next week!" Just that! Without pity or consideration . . . and that was married life! And in seven or eight months she might perhaps return with another beastly trophy to shove into her beastly den. . . . Ugly, hideous room! Arthur Reginald had always loathed it; now he wanted to destroy it, for it symbolised the whole difference between his wife, and the soft, sweet-hearted, feminine, and, if the truth be indeed known, half-witted little wife of his dreams. Goaded by the contrast, anger swung into delirium. . . . "I *shan't* let her go! That's it!—I shan't *let* her go! I'll say 'no' next time she asks me! (But will she ask me?) I'll say 'no,' quite firmly!" muttered Clementina's husband, staring hard at the statue humped between himself and the sunset. The Prince Consort, presiding genius of the place which Arthur loved best. He felt a queer spasm of intimacy . . . a link. . . .

And then an inspiration: "*Assert yourself!*"

Yes, he would assert himself, powerfully. But why had he thought of that just now? Of course, yes . . . that famous incident told and re-told in every book he had ever read, of the Queen and her husband:

They had quarrelled, and the Prince Consort had locked the door of his room. Came an imperious tap.

"Who is it?"

"The Queen!" And he would not open.

For the second time: "Who is it?"

"The Queen!"

And yet again, for the third time: "Who is it?"

"Your wife, Albert."

And they lived happy ever after. . . .

That, then, was the right way to behave with an imperious, imperial woman. What should he, Arthur Knox, do, to show Clementina that in future she was to be no more than his wife, his loving, acquiescent little home-bird?

What should he do?

A picture which came he knew not whence, snapped into his mind. It showed him standing in her den, erect, inflexible, stern and yet gentle. The room around him was a ruin. Every one of her possessions were smashed to pulp, ground to powder. . . . He had wrecked it, deliberately, for it stood for all he hated most in her life. . . . "Who has done this?" . . . "Your husband, Clementina!" . . . A swift melting into his forgiving arms. He had expressed his will once and for all; no need ever to do it again.

Dare he? Had he the courage? Was it a good thing to do?

. . . The sun was almost down now. Arthur Knox stared at the Prince, solitary under his Gothic canopy. Half unconsciously, he besought encouragement; a signal, if it were possible. . . .

And then, quite clearly, he saw the statue move its hand.

ONE of the casual sight-seers at the Memorial had also noticed the pigeon poised in sharp black relief against sunset gold, on the Prince Consort's left knee. He enquired of the little bearded man who sold postcards in the enclosure between the rail and the frieze: "Excuse me . . . Are those birds—er—allowed up there?"

The postcard-vendor glanced scornfully at his silly interlocutor: "Well, they don't never ask, not that I knows of!"

. . . Another pigeon wheeled round Albert's bronze head, and then slid down an invisible rush of wind to his mate. A few seconds later, and the two birds, stirred by the same impulse, soared away together till they were tiny curves far above the roof of the Albert Hall.

FEELING like Zeus armed with thunderbolts of wrath, Arthur Reginald crashed into the den of Clementina Knox, traveller and explorer; and picking up the nearest of those detestable trophies, which happened to be a slab of orbicular granite from Michigan, he hurled it furiously against the head of a Nyasaland buffalo grinning at him from the wall. . . . That would show them what sort of a man he was!

. . . Neither the granite nor the buffalo were in the least affected by their unlooked-for contact. The granite dropped with a thud to the floor . . . and Arthur, by impetus of his own violence, stumbled over the head

of a Kamchatkin Brown Bear-skin lying across the threshold, and fell almost as heavily. He picked himself up, hating the den more than ever. . . . The den, symbol of courage and daring and hardihood which he so woefully lacked. Never mind! His turn now!

Unfortunately for him, the dauntless Mrs. Knox had been all her life possessed by a quality of megalomania; perhaps because she was so small and slim and wiry herself; nerves like the finest steel springs; delicate small shapes of hands and feet, ridiculous, considering what they had accomplished. Therefore she had a passion for all that was immense and tough. Her den had been built on to the garden space of the house. It was a huge room, and far from cosy. Even the great stone idols, did not look unnaturally tall in it. Her husband particularly disliked these stone idols. There had been so much talk about them; interviewers had appeared, striving to find out if there were a lighter and more popular side to the archaeological interest they had aroused; and learned professors had quarrelled on such points as whether, being smaller than the idols on Easter Island, they had been made several thousand years later by a race become degenerate? or several thousand years earlier, before the race was so powerful and had so many slave captives? Arthur Reginald glared with bloodshot eyes at the Whitsun Island idols. With a certain rigid imperturbable courtesy, they stared back. Then, exasperated beyond all reason, he hurled himself upon one of them. The idol merely looked as though a fly had walked across its chest. . . . Arthur, bruised and baffled, sought for something

more effective with which to attack. The walls were a gleaming pattern of weapons of every sinister shape; needless to say, they were all big and terribly heavy.

Presently might have been seen the spectacle of Arthur Reginald lunging at a South Sea idol about eight feet high, with an assegai. . . . "Qu'il est drôle, ce petit bonhomme la!" remarked the idol—or words to that effect—to his brother idol. Arthur threw down the assegai. He was already sweating from his endeavours, but the den looked much the same as when he had entered it. He rolled his eyes round in search of further missiles; there were all sorts of lumps and rocks and crags lying about; he seized a pumiceous bomb, and threw it at the idol. It hit the stuffed Persian tiger, and rebounded. In his ordinary moments, Arthur would hardly have been capable of lifting the great chunk of smoky quartz from China, or the volcanic tear, or the block of stilbite which now, disregarding direction, and in his mood of abnormal fury, he threw again and again against the impassivity of the guardians of the doorway. . . . This room, this damnable room! . . . He was able to break nothing but his own heart. At the end of what seemed like hours of smashing destruction, he had created a preposterous confusion, and had snapped the tip off one horn of an East African white oryx. No more than that. Staggering over a heap of skins, tusks, and leather ox-saddles, he hammered desperately with a pair of rhinoceros tusks at the bristly whiskers of an incredibly patronising sea-elephant from the Crozet Islands. But his spirit was flagging . . . exhausted. It had first begun to recoil when he had tried to seize a

vast specimen of meteoric iron, so that he could batter the huge smooth shell of a land-tortoise who might just as well have stopped in the Siwalik Hills, for all the impression that England and Arthur Reginald could succeed in scratching upon him. . . .

Arthur's breath was coming in great sobs . . . his hair was wild and disarranged, streaking his forehead . . . his knuckles were bleeding in a hopeless sort of way.

It was upon this tableau that Clementina Knox made her entrance.

"Why—who's made all this mess?" she asked, amazed.

Arthur Reginald dropped the tusks, and swung round blindly towards the door. Here was his chance; now he should have delivered the speech in which he had planned to assert himself for ever as the strong dominant male: "Your husband, Clementina . . ."

. . . Not an hour ago, at the Albert Memorial, he had pleaded for a signal. Had the signal betrayed him?

He put up his hand, as though to brush away a blur of objects that swam dizzily in front of his sight: huge, tough, vindictive heads of beasts, iron and stone and horn and leather, things that would not shatter, would not crack even, for all his maddened efforts to show himself conqueror of the small, slim creature who had collected them. . . .

She repeated: "What *are* you doing, Arthur?"

And he replied: "My dear, I was just—well, I—I was just rearranging your den, for a surprise. It . . . looks a bit untidy, I'm afraid, but I'll soon tidy it up!"

TOES UNMASKED

TOES UNMASKED

GOLDEN TOES, the big walnut-coloured spaniel, saw no reason to move away from his comfortable lethargy in the overgrown onion-bed, when the Legs came up to the kennels. He gathered from what they said—among themselves, of course, not to him—they they purposed making their final selection of the black spaniel puppy they would keep from the remaining three of Renny's litter of seven. Two of them had died, and two had already disappeared from La Lucceola the little butter-yellow villa on a hill overlooking the Italian Mediterranean. Here Boris and Tessa, sometimes known as Big and Little Wolf, and the spaniels, Renny, Toes, and Poppit, happily passed their restless days, and their nights warm with dreams and whimpering starts and twitchings and regular heavy breathing.

Renny did not bother to be present during the ceremony of choosing which puppy was to remain with her. She said she knew that she could leave that sort of minor detail with every confidence to the Legs-in-Authority. She said that goodness knows she had had more than enough of the puppies during that wearisome month when she had been always shut up with them. She said that one daughter was very like another, after all. She said that it was far more important to discover the whereabouts of that tantalizing hedgehog smell which

lured her so often to the hollow roots of an old olive tree some quarter of a mile distant up the silvery slopes; so off she trotted, looking very brown and busy, and, as the Equestrian-Legs would say, every inch of her a little sport.

But Toes, her eldest son by her first husband, the late Doctor Watson, was curiously interested in the trio: silky black, flop ears, incredibly wise and pleading eyes. They were so like himself, and yet so utterly different. He had always felt that there was something very special about them; and now the fragments of talk which reached him from the Legs, who were bending absorbed faces above first one and then another of the puppies, confirmed this feeling.

"No, not Chloe! Chloe's got some white hairs on her chest—look!"

"Can't we keep Tulip? Tulip's the handsomest. She's by the far the biggest, too."

"She's got such a stupid face, and her nose is too long. Besides, I don't like these great heavy spaniels. . . ."

Toes did not wince. He very rarely betrayed any surface emotion. Besides, he knew that he was huge and clumsy, with enormous golden paws, and wise bulges of dewlap. "Your one beauty," Renny said to him over and over again, "is your colour. And even then, most Legs admire a quiet brown more than that loud blaze of russet. . . ." Renny, since her romance with the famous Dark Gentleman of San Remo, had lost all her previous humility, and made the others suffer

a great deal by being both a bore and conceited, instead of merely a bore, as of old.

"I don't like these great heavy spaniels," repeated the tactless Legs-in-Authority, and Toes dropped his head nearer the ground and took a deep breath of onion.

"I vote we keep this one."

"Why, she's the smallest!"

"I know, but she's by far the prettiest, and she's so game! Do you know, this morning I found her with a bone twice her size, sitting in the armchair, spitting and growling like a little fury, defending it from Boris and Tessa!"

"She'd no right to be in the armchair," argued the Shapely-Legs, promptly. Toes was conscious of a swift fellow-feeling for the smallest of the black puppies. He sometimes sat in armchairs himself, but the Legs always made a fuss; though he could occasionally avert a scolding by rolling over clumsily on to his back, opening his mouth wide, and dabbing with all four paws at the air. He had discovered that when he accentuated his natural tendency to chunkiness and unwieldy gambolling, it always worked out, in some odd way, to his advantage. So that he had become very much the good-natured clown in the circus of Luceola dogs, and was content, in his philosophy, that it should be so; for to try to be otherwise than what you are, leaves you too little time for meditation.

Apparently the Legs, after some more wrangling, had definitely fixed on the smallest, liveliest, and prettiest of the puppies, and had named her Ossie—after a Hun-

garian dancer, they said, and because of her prowess in defending her bones. Already, with that strong sense of property that is rampant in every Legs, they were talking of her as though she were something marvellous in dog-flesh. Her points and breeding were discussed, and her ancestry; and then, prophetically, her future. They had never talked of Toes like this, nor of Poppit, poor little Poppit, the runt of the Doctor Watson litter, so small and old-fashioned and feeble.

"Renny's quite a good little cocker in her way, you know, though of course Leander was streets ahead of her, with a pedigree as long as my arm. I saw it when I went over to fetch him, that time. It was awfully decent of the Petersons to lend him. If Ossie is anything like her father . . ."

"Queer, isn't it, that they should all have been black? Such jet black, too. All Leander, and not a streak of Renny in any of them, to look at. I shall wait till Ossie's a year old, and then I'll show her at Genoa. She ought to carry off a first."

They bore Ossie away into the house, petting and caressing her. In passing, the Shapely-Legs gave Toes an affectionate prod in his massive ribs. "Darling fat old stupid!" she said. Toes wagged his short plumed tail, and looked unutterable longing and idiocy, upwards.

Tulip and Chloe, now that their banishment from La Luceola had been definitely pronounced, had already ceased, somehow, to exist; but little black Ossie, with her rippling ears and soft yet brilliant amber eyes, her short dewy nose, her winsome face and high spirits, her

breeding and her fearlessness—Ossie, sole remaining daughter of the famous Dark Gentleman, was the eighth wonder of the world!

Toes, Golden Toes, slowly scrambled to his paws, and lurched forward a few paces to where the onions grew like a grotesque white and green forest, shimmering into mysterious bluish balls on top of each tall stem. The patch had been neglected owing to a quarrel between Savoury-Legs, the gardener, and the Italian-Retainer-Legs, who was the cook. There, shielded alike from heat and importunity, Toes flopped down again, and lay spatchcock, his back legs in a curiously symmetrical pattern, stretched out flat behind him. He always lay spatchcock when he wanted to reflect.

It was aristocratic to be black, if you were a spaniel. A touch of divinity, like the sheen on a black pearl, lay athwart little Ossie's shining ebony. Brown spaniels were common. Watson had been brown, and Renny, and Poppit, and, of course, himself—all different browns, but brown. But Renny's seven coal-black puppies—Toes had never seen any spaniel like them, except one!

Except one. Yes, he could remember dimly, lifting his mind backwards across what seemed like a great abyss of time, that wildly exciting moment when the Dark Gentleman had been brought by the Legs to La Luceola, and was admitted, again by the Legs, to Renny's presence, where she fumed and whimpered behind the door of the goat-shed.

Long ago, in the spring. . . . And now here was June, and here were the puppies, Renny's puppies, and they were black, too; not, like Renny, brown; but black,

like the black spaniel from San Remo, who had loved Renny.

And suddenly revelation came to Toes. He *knew*, and the knowledge was like a hot wriggle of light through his whole being.

Cause and effect. . . . Love and birth. . . . It was because the Dark Gentleman had once upon a time come to La Luceola, that Renny's puppies were born black. Toes understood now, and all the world seemed more tightly drawn together, strand upon strand, link after glowing link. He had discovered the secret, and he was one now with the hot earth that pushed up the onions to a jungle high above his head; with the tiny scurrying beetles so close to his benevolent nose. And he was glad, because of this new feeling of power that made him strong. And most of all glad because he recognized that he was a rare dog who could keep secrets, and would not want to rush about, barking and scattering them for all the other dogs to hear.

He thought again, and tenderly, of Ossie. Perhaps one day, not yet, but one day, now that he understood . . .

Supposing by a miracle of Dog—and Toes trembled a little—supposing his own son could be a shining silky black puppy? If he remained humble, and did not let himself become a proud Toes because he had guessed the world's secret, nor strut around as though it were a secret invented and perfected by him . . .

Supposing . . .

Why not?

Golden Toes sank his head on to his paws with a sigh. He felt exhausted now, but strangely peaceful; and in

spite of being tired, so much more alive than he had ever been before. He heard Boris barking his name aloud, but he did not care to answer. Presently Boris discovered him, and smashed a way through the onion stems, leaving several bent and broken behind him.

"So there you are!" remarked Boris, chummily. "Hot, isn't it? What are you thinking about?"

Toes paused for several seconds before he definitely decided what he ought to have been thinking about.

"Biscuits," he said at last, "and duty."

Boris nodded approval. Biscuits and Duty. . . . The right sort of things. Toes was sound, not a doubt of it.

OSSIE had a very happy puppyhood at La Luceola; a nature less sweet than hers might, indeed, have been spoilt by the aura of extra petting and cherishing with which the Legs surrounded her. So confident was she of her privileged welcome in the sitting-room, even when wet, that she used to dance in sideways, scramble into the nearest lap, and thrust up her impudent shiny little black muzzle to be kissed, without the slightest fear that it might be rudely pushed away.

The other dogs were most of them too big for her to play with, though they regarded her indulgently and without jealousy; so she passed long hours sitting in the kennel of poor little Poppit, her delicate half-sister, who had never grown up properly, and was now unmistakably in a decline.

Ossie was never bored with Poppit, even through the long moral tales that all ended with admonitions to be good and docile and obedient, and to put others first.

There was one thing which Poppit seemed to have particularly on her mind, and that was the sad condition of Savoury-Legs, the gardener, who, alas, drank too much wine, and drank too much wine much too often; and squandered his earnings, and what ought to have been his savings, on wine; and then was heard singing at night, round and round and round the moon-washed villa, in ever-widening circles.

"We must not condemn him," quoth Poppit to Ossie, "but pity him for his weakness. Indeed, my little sister, I feel sure that a good dog's love might work wonders. I—nay, do not weep—shall not be with you long. Every night the dog-star shines a little brighter for me. But to you, Ossie, I leave this solemn charge. Love Savoury-Legs, and do what you can to win him from his weakness." And Ossie faithfully promised.

Poppit lingered on until August, and then passed away. By this time the Legs had already been in England for a month, and were not expected to return home from their holiday until the end of September. Boris felt their absence more than any of the other dogs. He was very dependent on their companionship; and even the friend of the Legs-in-Authority, the Substitute-Legs, who meanwhile inhabited La Luceola, doing what was vaguely known as "seeing to things," could not wholly rouse the Big Wolf from his state of luscious and rather resentful melancholy.

Three months. A whole quarter of a year—an enormous weight of time by dog-reckoning. And then at last came one marvellous evening, when the moon hung low and red, like the very soul of tomato, between misty

sky and dull-blue sea, and the sound of wheels rumbled up the curving road, and the flash of a carriage-lamp shone at the foot of the steep garden path, and a voice that was like none other in the world, the voice of the Legs-in-Authority, called out: "Boris, Boris, Boris! Toes, Renny, Boris, Tessa! Boris, Boris, Boris, *Boris!*" And other voices blended in: "Boris! Ossie, Ossie, Ossie! I *am* curious to see Ossie, aren't you? *Darling* Boris! Good old Toes!" to the ecstatic prancing shapes of wolf and spaniel that swarmed round their knees, and leapt at their chests.

Ossie, by some mischance, had been left behind, shut into the dining-room when the others had raced out.

"Where's Ossie?" cried the expectant Legs, bursting into the hall. The Italian-Retainer-Legs had lit up the house brilliantly in honour of the arrival. Ossie was scratching and barking on the other side of the dining-room door. Suddenly it was flung open for her. She hardly remembered the Legs, but she ran forward in a friendly fashion to greet them: "Won't they think I've grown a big dog!"

Incredulous, horrified, the Legs gazed at her.

Ossie? Could this be Ossie? Could this odd and whippy little dog-compendium really be the legatee of that pure-bred black spaniel, Leander? This—this small atrocity, whose legs were too long, whose coat was common and curly, whose head was too small and thin, none of whose separate parts seemed to fit together to make spaniel? This—the peerless Ossie?

What could have happened?

And the next day they were even more disgusted; for

whereas the older dogs could hardly be persuaded to quit for one moment the company of their beloved Legs, Ossie pattered all day long a yard and a half behind Savoury-Legs, following him up the garden, and following him down the garden, to and fro among the artichokes, and back to the great rain-water barrel, in and out of the cantina where the straw flasks and great dummi-junni of wine were kept, up the path to feed the rabbits—wherever Savoury-Legs went, there Ossie went too, his faithful and adoring shadow.

“This dog,” said Savoury-Legs, who always delivered his few remarks with much pomp and pregnancy, well aware that they must be utterances worth hearing to the ignorant; “This dog is a *cagnia di razza*, a dog of race. She is the best and the most beautiful of them all. She is also a sport-dog, and worth many soldi; and she is devoted to me—*io, io*,” and he indicated himself several times by pointing towards his own chest. Then, crying: “*Viene, La Pops!*” he strode away, and Ossie unhesitatingly followed.

The Legs looked at one another. “Well, he’d better have her, I think. After all, she’s not much good to us.”

So Ossie was given to Savoury-Legs, and became merely a gardener’s dog. She did not mind her fall in the social status; for, urged primarily by the spirit of her little dead sister Poppit, she had by now genuinely become devoted to Savoury-Legs, and mingled less and less with the rougher dog-life at La Luceola. Perhaps in unconscious recognition, he always called her La Pops, never Ossie.

Savoury-Legs was indeed enormously proud of his possession of Ossie. Like Toes, he, another of those simple souls to whom inspiration often comes more readily than to the sophisticated, had recognized in the black puppies a very special something, an importance, an aristocracy. The Legs had once told him what the pedigree father, Leander of San Remo, had originally cost; and Savoury-Legs, staggered and amazed, had worked it out to enough *soldi* to make him drunk on every festa and Sunday, and three times a month, for two and a half years. "Body of Bacchus!" he exclaimed respectfully. And then, too, Ossie had the mysterious merit of being "English," the style of well-bred dog that the English milords took about with them for the sport, so the legend ran. Oh, she was undoubtedly a *cagnia di razza!*

And behind the glamour, and in addition to it, was the pleasant fact that she had looks which Savoury-Legs could, without any highbrow effort, admire heartily: the crimp in her coat, her high, quick, thin black legs resulting in a figure so much more admirable than the low-slung bodies of Renny or Toes. Savoury-Legs began to tell himself stories about this nearly strange Savoury-Legs who was the owner of La Pops. If one possessed an English milord's dog, then one must be worthy of it: live up to the dignity, shave perhaps more often. . . .

Drink, perhaps, less often. . . .

"Have you noticed," Boris remarked to the others, after several days of the usual November rain had fal-

len on the parched and cracking earth, "that Savoury Legs hasn't been singing round the place at nights, as he used to?"

"I haven't heard him for weeks, now I come to think of it," Toes agreed. "And he usually has an awful bout after a spell of rain, because there's nothing else for him to do."

"I don't blame him," said Tessa. "This weather gets on my nerves so, I could take to drink myself; I like it."

Boris smiled indulgently on his refractory mate.

"Come! Come! How can you know if you like it or not?"

"I do know," Tessa darted back at him. "The spaniels wouldn't, because they still sleep in the kennels. But you've seen how the Legs have pampered me lately, and given me the goat-shed to sleep in, and special straw and extra meals, and even allowed me on the divan? Good for Tessa, I say!"—with an impudent little prance. "Last night, when I was half asleep in my own apartment, the Legs came in with a large saucer of milk, and something in it that smelt rather like from Savoury-Legs' mouth, only different and nicer. They were half laughing, and rather excited to see what I'd do, and Shapely-Legs said: 'I do hope she'll lap it! A spot of brandy will keep the damp out; and of course, just now . . .' I haven't had much appetite lately," lied the Little Wolf, who every day gobbled up three times more than her usual share, and then hung about for extras. So I smelt this, and then I smelt it again; and as I adore new sensations, I took the risk and tasted it. By Dog, it was glorious! I was through that saucer-

ful like a streak, and then I rushed down after the Legs for more. It was like rushing on thin air, and the garden was pirouetting and zigzagging down the hill, and where the house stood there were two swaying houses, both bright pink! Yes, there were, Toes, you needn't argue—two! But I rushed between them into the dining-room, and the Legs were all drinking this glorious smell, out of big, tulip-shaped glasses, and they weren't a bit angry; only amused. But though I begged and begged for more, they wouldn't give it to me—the beasts! So I went back to bed, and I won't tell any of you what I dreamt!”

Her dark oblique eyes mocked Boris, and defied him to enter her paradise—poor, slow Boris.

“Well, I never did!” Renny held up her paws in horror.

“No, *you* wouldn't!” laughed unrepentant Tessa. But then that heaviness of spirit which had been afflicting her lately, descended on her again. She sighed, and knowing that Renny was on the brink of a boring anecdote, tried to fall asleep before it had properly begun.

Renny said: “Last time Savoury-Legs came up in the morning rather the worse for liquor, and smelling dreadfully stale, my dears, as Tessa said—I'm sensitive to smells— Last time, as I was saying, and it must have been—let me see, was it before or after the Legs came home? I believe before, because he hadn't put fresh straw in my kennel, and I was annoyed about it; for the one thing that I cannot and will not stand is neglect of our daily task. Well, as I was saying, when I found out that he'd been drinking—Toes; one side of your face

is all caught up again! It does give you such an odd, puffy appearance!”

“You do it yourself,” said Toes somnolently, lying spatchcock under the table; “and anyway, do remember that I’m not a puppy any more.”

Renny crooned, sentimentally: “You will always be a little puppy to me!”

Tessa groaned. She mistrusted Renny’s maternal instinct; as well she might, considering how indecently soon Renny used to try and wriggle away from the importunities of her seven little blackamoors, and escape for long walks. “It’s all show and nothing to it!” scoffed Tessa.

“. . . I just sat there,” Renny completed her anecdote triumphantly, “and I looked up at him so that he couldn’t help seeing the deep reproach in my eyes; and I’m sure I made him thoroughly ashamed of himself, because from this moment to that—no, from that moment to this—he hasn’t touched a drop!”

“It isn’t you,” said Toes, briefly, but to the point. “It’s Ossie!”

The other dogs looked rather offhand and casual. They could not help slightly echoing the Legs’ attitude towards Ossie—that she had rather let down the Lucceola kennels. No harm in her, but she was only a gardener’s dog.

“It’s all very well,” persisted Toes. “But there’s a *lot* in Ossie.”

“Talking of poor Ossie reminds me,” Renny began again, “of a compliment that was paid to me when I was just about her age. It was on a Tuesday—”

Tessa got up, yawned, and walked out of the room—fortunately the doors were open—into the garden.

A little white village on the coast towards the east was suddenly suffused with an unearthly garnet glow, from a last valiant leap of sun between two purplish-black clouds over the mountains in the west. The rain had stopped, and all the puddles had caught fire. Perhaps it would be fine again to-morrow. With a little grunt of satisfaction, Tessa withdrew into her own private apartment, and cuddled down securely in the straw. . . .

THE goat-shed where Tessa lay with her pups was dark, but not gloomy, for it was wrapped round so brilliantly with Italian sunshine that some of the gold pierced the odd-shaped chinks and slats in the roughly-boarded walls, and lay in a soft pattern of burnished coins on the pale yellow straw. In a shadowy corner, a great truss of straw was piled up to the roof, ready for further use; and on a high shelf stood a pyramid of earthenware gardening pots, and these, too, the intruding sun-slants lit up here and there as though they were bright jagged bits of jewellery.

This warm shadowy little room had a tang of earth and wood, and the breath of milk, and a furry cubsy smell of the jungle had crept in, too; and there were small, comfortable sounds and squeaks of tumbling bodies, half-hidden in the rustle of the straw; and the sudden thump of Tessa's tail as she looked up with eyes that were softer and yet more radiant than they had ever been before, to greet the Legs trustfully, and to show off the fat little shapes, some silvery black, some

fawn and grizzled silver like herself, huddled sleepily against her side. . . .

"Hush, she's quite all right. Come away, don't disturb her."

The narrow slit of doorway, discreetly opened, was closed again. Footsteps stole away. In the distance someone was calling the other dogs for a walk. Tessa heard them scampering past, but she did not care. How pleasant it was here, cut off and apart in her shrine among the sombre earth-coloured shadows, watching the gilding creep slowly over the straw, from south to west, and then fade and die away. . . . Nice, alone here, where it was quiet and warm, and the dark air was like a protective cloak! *Nice*—for she was not wholly alone. . . . And she moved her lithe body into a semi-circle, so that her cubs—blind eyes in a network of screwed-up black wrinkles, strong little paws pushing, pushing away for life—might crouch down and be warmer still. . . .

BORIS remarked to Toes: "Ossie looks slightly better than usual this morning."

This was a formula which Toes recognized. He had heard it before, about Renny and about Tessa; but when these two were in question, the other dogs had said: "How strangely beautiful Renny (or Tessa) is looking this morning."

Ossie was only the gardener's dog.

Golden Toes, in his latent and acute consciousness of a synthetic world, where nothing was haphazard nor separated, looked meditatively at Boris. . . . He was slightly alarmed, but this must not be betrayed, so he

half shut his eyes, and waited for Boris to give himself away.

Boris fell heavily on the wall beside Toes. For this was his manner of lying down.

"Another time," the Big Wolf went on, amiably conversing as club-dogs do, "I might have considered a mild flirtation with the little thing. She really is not entirely devoid of charm, you know. I mean, really—" Again he waited for Toes to chime in, but the spaniel rested his square-cut dewlaps on his enormous and reliable paws, and only said:

"The Legs are having marrow-bones in the dining-room; and I think, I'm not sure, but I *think* that when they've done with them, the Legs will bring a couple out here for us. I like eating out of doors, don't you?"

"Yes," said Boris. "*And* indoors." He watched the dining-room door with interest, but at the same time did not entirely abandon the subject of Ossie. "But I do feel very strongly, Toes, and I hope that one day you'll remember what I'm saying to you—I don't want to be a bore and all that, nor treat you to a lecture, but there are some things a dog can't do, unless he's a cad. And I do feel that it's up to me to remain faithful to Tessa"—and Boris added with emphasis—"just at present," and tried to prick his lamentably floppy ears in the direction of the goat-shed.

"Quite," rumbled Toes gently, "quite, oh, quite! I mean, naturally. Of course, puppies are a tie. A great tie. Naturally. Yes."

"And the Legs tell me that they are *mine*!" Boris looked at Toes, and his eyes were wide open and in-

credulous. "Mine! Most gratifying." He howled a little, and cleared his throat.

Softly, under layers and layers of packed silence, Toes caressed his secret. "The Legs tell me that they are mine!" . . . And Boris, honest, simple dog that he was, just accepted the information. He did not know—as Toes knew. Nor, seemingly, did Tessa know, for she growled as menacingly when Boris came near the goat-shed where she guarded her pups, as when Toes or any of the others sauntered by.

But Toes knew. . . .

"Most gratifying!" Boris repeated. "But what I went through, over it all!" He was so engrossed in his topic that he did not notice the dining-room door open. "It will be an expense, of course; a heavy expense. The daughters can stay in the kennels and help their mother, but—"

"Help their mother do what?" asked Toes.

Boris looked vague, but was saved from reply by the exquisite spectacle of a large juicy marrow-bone, with plenty of meat still clinging to it, dropped directly beneath his nose. Toes was given a rather smaller bone.

"*Most* gratifying!" repeated Boris, for the third time, but it was doubtful now whether he referred to his family.

Golden Toes was moved by sudden mischief to suggest:

"If they're really yours, as the Legs say—"

"*If?*" Boris's tone was reproachful. "I accept the statement implicitly."

"Then of course you'll want to take them your bone?"

Paternal instinct, you know. Catering for the young and helpless."

Boris gazed at Toes, stricken. With so much conversation going on, he had only just got the bone into his mouth, and had not really tasted a particle of its savour as yet. But if such sacrifices were really expected of him— All his life, Boris had put decency before greed. Slowly, reluctantly, he let his jaws fall apart. The bone dropped out and lay untasted on the wall.

"Oh, look here!" cried Toes, in a great hurry. He did not mind fun, but he could not bear to see the hero of his schooldog days involved in tragedy. "Eat it up, Boris, do. It's quite all right. Those puppies—they haven't got any teeth yet. They couldn't eat a bone even if you brought it to them." This was pure guess-work on his part, but it sounded plausible enough.

Boris heaved a great sigh of relief, and his eyes were a little humid as he gobbled his treasure.

"But I should have, you know," he murmured.

And Toes said warmly: "Of course you would!"

But presently, when he had got rid of Boris, he lumbered quietly up to the goat-shed, and, not heeding the menace of Tessa's furious growls and snappings, writhed into a low position where he could get one eye down to a hole in the boards. He could not see much, at first. Then presently he caught glimpses. . . .

Toes moved away, mightily reassured.

"Whatever is all the fuss about? Not one black puppy among them all! Just common grey and fawn grizzle. A few black streakings, but they don't count." And then, ruminating, he lay spatchcock, his nose pointed across

the valley towards the opposite hill, where, amongst the smoky haze of olives, one aloof and sable cypress emphasized a tiny ruined stone hut beside it.

For several days Ossie was not seen at La Luceola, and no faithful black shadow pattered up and down the garden after Savoury-Legs. The Legs-in-Authority had given instructions, and Savoury-Legs, a little in awe of his patrician piece of property, had eagerly signified his willingness to obey them. "She is too young, you see," the Legs had said.

But it was a pity, all the same, thought Savoury-Legs, as he strode home, sober, though it was wage-day, to his hut below the cypress-tree; a great pity! He was a sentimental man, and though there was no dog at La Luceola, nay, nor in San Goffredo, nor indeed in all Italy, worthy to be the mate of his peerless La Pops—*cagnia di razza*, type of an English milord's sport-dog—yet princesses have been known to stoop to a *mésalliance* before now. Well, at least, concluded Savoury-Legs, anticipating with pleasure his dinner of spaghetti, garlic, and hens' heads, at least he need not be *too* vigilant. For, after all, La Pops was his, his own, his treasure!

A few days after Tessa's puppies were born, the Legs were informed of a dog-show at Genoa, about an hour's journey away. If things had been otherwise, Tessa would undoubtedly have been exhibited. The splendid dogly Boris, for all his massive dignity, his noble white throat, the deep roll of his voice like a summons to battle, was yet not eligible to compete against the stern convention that the ears of a wolf-dog should be upright and pricked. That left Renny and Golden Toes, and the Legs

decided at once, and without discussion, that of the two, Renny was the better spaniel, with the most chance of gaining glory.

“You see, Toes, old boy”—rolling him over on to his back, and prodding him, literally and spiritually, in all his vulnerable spots—“there isn’t a class where they give a prize for huge paws! Otherwise, of course—” Toes lolled and gambolled and got in the way, and behaved as though it were all a great joke. “Good old Toes! You are a funny old thing!”

And then they went off with Renny on a lead, glossy, and beautifully brushed.

But first the Legs-in-Authority warned the Italian-Retainer-Legs to keep an eye on the dogs, that they did not stray out of the garden. For there had lately been a scare in San Goffredo. An Official-Legs was striding about, swooping on all dogs without muzzle or lead, and carrying them off to captivity. There were rumours of heavy penalties: in some cases when a dog snapped at his captor, of blows, a shot from a gun. . . . The sort of legends that panic creates.

It was evening, blowing and raining, before the Legs returned again, with Renny and her first prize, and her enormous increase of vanity. Boris ran baying down the path to meet them, and was the first to hear the good news.

“My dear,” said Renny, strutting along beside him, gasping a little from the hill, “it was simply a roll-over!” And she gossiped about the show, and the class of dogs whom she had met there, and what the judges had said. Boris listened courteously, and rather regret-

ted that he was so brave and reliable that he had had to be left behind to guard the house—for this was the tactful and solacing way in which the Legs had explained to him his omission from the party.

“Ah,” quoth Renny, sadly shaking her head, “but if Ossie . . . If my hopes had not been so grievously disappointed in a certain direction that I won’t name, there would have been two show-dogs, and two prizes at La Luceola!” And she added pensively: “A first and a second prize.”

The Italian-Retainer-Legs, very perturbed and agitated, met them on the threshold. “Signore, il Toes. . . . You have not by chance seen him on the way? We have been calling and calling—*Dio mio!*—for two, three hours now he is missing! That one there in the town with the whip and the gun—he has met, he has taken, he has killed! *Mama mia! Corpo di Baccho! Accidente!*” and so forth. For the Italian-Retainer-Legs very easily despaired.

They sought for Toes in every room, under every table, in every corner of the garden. Then, really anxious, the Legs took torches, and began to search farther up the mule-tracks, meanwhile sending the Italian-Retainer-Legs down to the town to make breathless inquiries. Thus the house was deserted, except for Boris the guardian—for Renny was having conceited dreams in her kennel—when Golden Toes stumbled into the hall, and blinked at the light, and at Boris. . . .

He was perhaps the most dilapidated-looking spaniel in the whole world of spaniel-dom; wet, tousled, his hair

matted and muddy where the short sturdy legs had not lifted his body high enough to clear the ground, stuck all over with leaves, one ear inside out, his nose a disgrace, his tail draggled—but still invincible.

“Great Spratt!” exclaimed Boris, “if you don’t take the biscuit! Where *have* you been? Did the Official-Legs get you? The Legs are hunting for you all over the place. I wouldn’t be on your paws for anything, when they see you. You *are* a muddy fool!”

But Toes did not seem in the least perturbed or apprehensive. It was doubtful whether he had even heard Boris. His eyes were rims of blazing topaz round their velvety black pupils; and his behaviour had that strange, fantastic gleam on it, far removed from the homely Toes that Boris thought he knew so well.

For he walked straight past the Big Wolf and into the sitting-room, where the six windows were squares of sapphire dusk, and the gallant flames from the olive-wood fire illuminated the empty divan, covered by a Persian rug of faintly blended colours, and the many cushions on the divan, and the heap of delicate pale pink crêpe de chine which the Womanly-Legs had been embroidering the night before and had carelessly left there. It looked very luxurious, and it was, of course, strictly forbidden territory to any dog whatsoever. But Toes, not even hesitating, placed both his large, wet, earth-encrusted fore-paws upon the Persian rug, and wriggled his way up on to the cushions, heaved and scrabbled about for a moment until he got comfortable at the end of the divan nearest the fire, and then sank down against

a dainty background of crêpe de chine, and lay spatchcock . . . while Boris gazed at him with open jaws, utterly bewildered and aghast.

For Toes was above himself. The divan was for the Legs, but he judged that his wisdom was now equal to the wisdom of the Legs, for he knew that which they knew: he had guessed the secret of the mysterious affinity between the seed and the flower and the fruit; he was aware that out of desire and a dream may be wrought an eternal chain, not to be broken down the generations of dog, through his puppies, and his puppies' puppies. . . .

Golden Toes was not arrogant, but he simply could not see, this night, why he was not an equal of the Legs. —Until they came in.

"TOES!!!" thundered the Legs-in-Authority. They were hoarse from crying his name; tired out with the added anxiety of his disappearance, on top of the dog-show; thoroughly upset and irritable and worried. And then they came in to find him. . . .

Toes collapsed. He collapsed utterly. Flown was his conviction, logical yet exalted, that he was lordly and godlike, and could do as he pleased. He was just a spaniel again—a very wet and dirty spaniel, a disobedient spaniel who would probably be thrashed, a spaniel on the divan, where he didn't ought to be.

He rolled over on to his back and waved his four abject paws in the air, and let a yard of red flannel tongue loll foolishly; for with all his pricked dignity, he just remembered that it was as a comic character the

Legs knew him, and as a comic character they might just pardon him. . . .

THE Legs-in-Authority was rather angry with Savoury-Legs, when, a couple of months later, he heard the news about Ossie. He suspected that Savoury-Legs had been a lax guardian.

“You’ll have to keep one, of course, to comfort Ossie. Only one, though. The rest had better be drowned straight away. She’s not old enough to bring up a litter, and besides . . .”

What remained unsaid was his conviction that a suitor must undoubtedly have presented himself at the gardener’s hut, at the time of wooing, who was neither distinguished for his nobility nor with any pretensions of beauty and learning. Savoury-Legs obeyed orders in a great hurry; for it had by now penetrated to the obstinate portion of his skull that the English, and the Legs-in-Authority particularly, knew more than he did about the care of sport-dogs; and he was fearful lest he might lose his darling, his black gem, his elegant princess, La Pops.

So Ossie was very rarely seen any more at La Lucceola, but her absence was quite imperceptible. For this was mid-January, when in Italy you may take a deep breath and say already: “Winter is nearly over. Look, the violets are out!” And the dogs at La Lucceola always rejoiced and grew excited when the Legs began to make remarks of this nature. Boris and Toes, Renny, Tessa, and Rollo the wolf-pup, did not pick violets themselves,

but they loved being taken for long walks; and it was so nice, while they stretched their limbs, springing from terrace to terrace, or tore round in mad circles under the olives, for the Legs to have some quite harmless interest that prevented them from turning homewards too early. For after the violets came the narcissi, milky clots in the dusky silver shadows, and then the wild tulips and the grape hyacinths, and after that all the family of orchis, and bright blue borage mingling with wild garlic, growing in rings of sky and snow round the roots of the trees.

And now it was late April, and the Legs were still going for walks, for they could pick huge armfuls of wild gladioli and spikes of brilliant yellow broom; and they trod on scented wild thyme, and there were clumps of wistful love-in-a-mist, and patches of red poppies.

One day, instead of going straight on and up, towards the circle of umbrella-pines on top of the hill, the Legs-in-Authority turned sharply to the left, calling to Renny, who was scuffling away far down the valley on some business of her own. He had heard rumours of some special lily that had been seen in this new direction.

Suddenly, where an open terrace broke abruptly away down to the valley and the sea, they came to a little magical clearing, in a trance of soft sunshine. A very tall cypress stood beside a dark and bushy ilex-tree. It was the cypress which could be seen from La Luceola. "I believe somebody told me that Savoury-Legs lives near here," remarked Boris to Tessa.

Toes was ahead of them all. He rushed forward hap-

pily, as though on familiar ground, sniffed for an instant round the broken walls of a one-roomed hut, grey and dreaming among the scattered olive-trees, whose branches were themselves like twisted dreams, across the motionless dark-blue sea. . . . And then his glad barking drew a volley of shorter, sharper barking from the farther side, the shady side. He was unseen now, but the Legs followed him round. There, facing the cool east, for all the south and west were stewing in the hot afternoon, lay Savoury-Legs, relaxed, asleep on the grass, in the shade; and there, only a pace or two away, sat Ossie, tenderly watching over him.

But the barks were not from her; in fact, she was distinctly anxious for fear the silence so swiftly broken might disturb the slumberer's peace. A black spaniel puppy, more beautiful than Renny, far more beautiful than Toes, and infinitely more beautiful than Ossie, was tumbling over and over in jubilant welcome of the big golden-brown spaniel, who affectionately licked him, and adjusted one of his ears.

"Good heavens!" gasped the Legs-in-Authority, "that can't be—? Yes—no—it must be, though! By Jove, and he's the very image of Leander!"

The joyous tumble of brown spaniel and black spaniel lurched over Savoury-Legs' face. Ossie reproved them, but it was too late. The idyll was shattered. Awake, and not at all embarrassed, he greeted his employer Legs, and begged them to take a glass of wine with him.

Ignoring the suggestion, they broke into bewildered enquiries about the black puppy. "We simply *must* have

him," whispered the Shapely-Legs to the Legs-in-Authority. It did not look as though this were going to be difficult. Savoury-Legs, apparently, was disappointed in Ossie's offspring, so different from the mother, and therefore obviously not, in his eyes, a *cagnia di razza*. He proceeded to demonstrate to the Legs how all the puppy's points were wrong, and was just about to sell him back to La Luceola for a dummi-junni of strong local vintage, when Ossie's imploring little paws, and upturned liquid eyes, reminded him that alien qualities of thrift and sobriety were what La Pops preferred in the Savoury-Legs of her adoption. And with a stern and lordly gesture, he bargained for five hundred lire, instead.

The Legs-in-Authority shrugged his shoulders, but consented. It was obvious that the grandson of the famous Dark Gentleman of San Remo was peerless according to the existing spaniel standards. A throwback, of course. But also a miracle.

"But who's the father?" he cried, remembering that some miracles have their solution.

Savoury-Legs pointed to a massive hunk of golden-brown, now lying spatchcock, his coat like a beach of ribbed sand at sunset, his topaz eyes fondly, proudly fixed upon the gambolling puppy. . . .

"Il Toes!" said Savoury-Legs.

THE SLOWER JUDAS

THE SLOWER JUDAS

CLIFFE? Let me see, are you the Cliffe who wrote "The Devil a Monk Would Be?" "

"No; that was my father."

"Your father? Oh, yes; then you must be the Cliffe who wrote that wonderful, ironic thing—a poem, wasn't it?—'Not At Home to Hannibal?'"

"No; that is my son."

Hilary Cliffe was not aware that his voice, during this fragment of dialogue, was apt to sound a little flat, a trifle mechanical. So often had he to repeat his denials; inevitably so often. He was the son of the famous Lawrence Cliffe, the father of Christopher Cliffe, famous in a more modern style, less spectacular. Christopher seemed to prefer his fame, like that, yet he was only twenty-three. Hilary was proud of him, of course. He never interfered with the boy, though he did not wholly understand him. It was not as though Chris were likely to rebel against authority; he belonged to that neo-postmodern gang whose cult it was to be old-fashioned in behaviour. So he actually lived at home with his father, they shared a flat in South Kensington, and nobody even thought this amusing.

Lawrence Cliffe, that genial, cynical old ruffian, rebel in the 'seventies and celebrity in the 'eighties, merely laughed at these new young men, as he had once laughed

at Hilary and his friends. Christopher smiled back sadly, most engagingly. He and his grandfather were apparently excellent companions, and Hilary, watching them, gratified at such an incongruous mating, attributed it to the fact that they were both famous; and that was such a pleasant thing to have in common!

Hilary himself was not even a distinguished failure. His work as the editor of a sober monthly journal was sound and moderately progressive. He was responsible for an annotated edition of the works of the Roman historian, Ammianus Marcellinus, and his "History of the Monastic Orders of Knighthood" would, no doubt, go on selling for many years.

Still, though the second of the three generations of Cliffe was not exactly famous, he had industriously contrived to build up a sort of mild eminence sufficient to content him. His was not an exacting nature.

The sensational reputation of "St. Lawrence" had been built up without effort in an hour. "St. Lawrence" could not fail to be his nickname, considering his rôle as the debonair hero of at least seventeen luscious scandals—the kind of society scandals which grow like plump, sweet strawberries, half-hidden by their protecting leaves. Naturally, his cronies called his home the "Gridiron"! And then, gradually, in his fastidious procession through the difficult years from fifty to seventy, it became evident that hitherto out-twinkled by his diamond glitter was his diamond philosophy, capable of cutting through the soft glass of sentimentality and proving it useless. It was said of him, gratefully, that he was the only veteran with a marvellous memory

and no reminiscences. With his elegant, lean figure, his white pointed beard and mocking upturned moustache, the quality of bravado in his eyelashes that also curled up towards the crisp silver of his hair, he was predestined in his unrepentant old age to be most respectfully placed in the *cher maître* category.

Hilary had had much to suffer as a child from his sophisticated parent. For his mother's sake he could not appear to approve either of St. Lawrence nor of the atmosphere of the Gridiron. His mother, a Victorian martyr, was always plaintive and never complained. Sensitively sure that Lawrence Cliffe must consider him a bore and a prig, Hilary stood with passionate zeal for his mother's cause. Yet now and then, and only deep in his soul, he could not refrain from a muffled disloyalty. The rake was so amusing, so popular, so plausible even when he scoffed. What fun it might be, if only you had a chance, if only a door were suddenly to open. What breathless fun actually to be allies with him, instead of eternally on the duller side!

When his mother died Hilary and his father began to see a good deal of each other in a perfectly amiable sort of way. They never talked about the past, because Hilary, in his early twenties, had already developed into a gentle, scholarly, and thoroughly hypocritical old-bachelor type. He had married timidly and discreetly, and his wife died so soon afterwards, at the birth of Christopher, that the incident hardly broke the crust of his essential bachelordom.

"I might as well add a grandson to the picturesque tableau of a sinner in his dotage!" remarked St. Law-

rence, to conceal his obvious fancy for Christopher.

Hilary was flattered, but surprised. He did not realise that perhaps the most glamorous relations which exist are those between grandparent and grandchild. Old Lawrence and young Christopher seemed so comfortable with each other that it might have occurred to Hilary that he was, himself, merely a now unnecessary link between them.

But Christopher was so nice to him, and so was Lawrence.

And then the climax: the publication of "Not At Home to Hannibal." At once the words "masterpiece," "genius," "the achievement of this century," began to be bandied about. An opposing school screamed that the poem was the work of an "insolent and blasphemous charlatan," and that was the yeast which finally raised the bread. Hilary prepared himself to cope with a son whose head was enormously swollen. It was disconcerting to find that Chris's head remained just the same size, and his gaze just as far-off and speculative. He was a serious lad, not easily excited. You had a curious feeling about him sometimes, as though he walked on snow, and his were the only footprints. Nor did he respond to applause with the same mischievous relish as his much-applauded grandfather, and soon he became engrossed in writing "The Slower Judas."

But Cliffe was a name doubly distinguished, now; and those who used to say to Hilary: "Aren't you proud of your father?" followed on with:

"You must be proud of your son!"

And after the achievements of both the illustrious

Cliffes had been fully discussed, they might or they might not say, according to their sum of perception: "You're not looking too well. Been overworking?"

Hilary was conscious that his manner was a little constrained as he replied with information about the final chapters of his annotated edition. It was heavy work, certainly; and at the same time he was pledged to write the biography of Cowper; and his publishers were worrying him for it. Yes, he had been overworking, and that accounted for the restless state of nerves which had afflicted him recently. He ate and drank and conversed without zest; his labours were a burden to him; he appeared absent-minded, irritable . . . Nerves!

"Your governor will have a breakdown if he doesn't take care!" a friend remarked to Christopher.

Christopher, that young recluse who noticed nothing of human well-being nor ill-being while he was engrossed in "The Slower Judas," nevertheless roused himself to investigate this matter of his father's nerves.

"What's up, dad?"

Hilary replied with a few wistful platitudes about growing old.

"That won't do," replied Chris. "You don't hear St. Lawrence holding forth about the western sunset in that style, and he's bound to be a bit older than you."

"Your grandfather has one of those boy's hearts which are born completely adult," said Hilary, with less benevolence than usual.

Christopher smiled.

"Oh, St. Lawrence is magnificent. But honestly, dad,

won't you go away somewhere for a long rest, and chuck up whatever you're doing? It's not important, is it?"

"No," murmured Hilary. "It isn't important." Then he recalled with a start what he was saying. "I can't possibly. I couldn't reconcile it with my conscience." And then he added fretfully: "Besides, I'm perfectly all right."

"Don't you *want* to go on a holiday?"

"I don't want to do anything!" Hilary was almost weeping by now, and Christopher's anxiety increased. All this petulance and depression was so unlike his usually tranquil parent. He wrote to St. Lawrence about it, and presently Lawrence Cliffe appeared in person at the flat in South Kensington. He lived most of the time in Paris, and very often in Rome, but he took his holidays in Vienna or in London, for he declared that he could not exist away from the spiritual massage which was only to be obtained in the capitals of Europe.

Hilary thought that he hated a fuss being made about his health; yet he felt remarkably better while Lawrence and Christopher were conferring about him, though ostentatiously he affected not to be aware of what was going on.

"Well, we've settled it all, Chris and I. You're to be packed off to Port Meurice next Friday. *I'll* finish your 'Life of Cowper' for you. His own mother wouldn't recognise him when I've done with him. I'm ashamed of you, Hilary, getting a breakdown from overwork. No one in our family has ever overworked before!"

Hilary smiled wanly, and murmured something about dying in harness. At the same time he wondered why all

his intelligence curled away into a corner and died directly he was brought into contact with his brilliant father. "I'm afraid Chris will be rather lonely," he suggested, lacking anything better to say, for he knew that Christopher was entirely sufficient unto himself.

Lawrence Cliffe said:

"I thought I might as well stay here with your poor deserted child for a month or two; possibly even longer. I've always had a fancy for your room, Hilary." Wholly unable to account for the pang which his father's suggestion had caused him, Hilary attempted a joke:

"Do you prefer my room to my company, sir?"

"I like the view of the Victoria and Albert Museum!" The old man evaded the question of Hilary's company. "I think it may steady me. It's flattering, at my age, that there are still certain French critics who consider that I am not serious. By the way, Chris, I hear that 'Not at Home to Hannibal' is being translated by Louis Moineau, of all people. You're lucky!"

Hilary left them absorbed in the discussion of their foreign rights.

"What a good thing," he thought, for the hundredth time, "that they get on so well together."

Perhaps, after all, they were right about him, and he had been overworking. This exhaustion was not natural.

Yet his despondency did not lift when he found himself, on his first evening at the exclusive little Grand-Hotel de l'Univers, Port Meurice, drinking his coffee on the veranda outside the dining-room. The night was

warm and velvety, though it was February, and smelt of heliotrope, and he ought to have been happy. Yet, what was there, to be happy about? reflected Hilary, in a jaundiced sort of way.

Moodily he watched the other people in the hotel. There were not many, but they formed a cheerful group; apparently they all knew each other quite well. Hilary was shy; it always took him a long time to get intimate with fresh people. He wished that either Lawrence or Christopher had cared to come along. "*Selfish* of them not to have thought of it!" His temper rose. "Glad to get me out of the way!" He kicked at the table on which stood his coffee, and spilled it. It ran over the edge of the marble on to a small white terrier. The coffee was hot, and the terrier leaped up yapping, and, not unreasonably, tried to bite Hilary.

"Pippin!" His mistress, a pretty girl with large adoring eyes and a mouth always slightly open, as though in expectation of heavenly manna, darted forward to rescue the calf of Hilary's leg. Their mutual apologies, and the reluctance of Pippin to be thus thwarted of calf, led them into conversation, half-laughing, half-embarrassed.

"You've only just come, haven't you?"

"Yes. Yes. I'm supposed to be taking a long rest."

"Oh, have you been working too hard?"

This is an accusation which is always pleasant, and in Hilary's case it was fortunately also true. He assented, with the usual murmur of deprecation.

"I suppose you're a politician?" enquired the girl, tentatively.

"Dear me, no! Nothing so important. Only a writer."
She gave a shrill cry.

"Oh, it's *you*, then! At least—we couldn't help seeing, there were some letters, and as we all know each other here—it's only a small hotel, but it's awfully jolly just to be one group like this, but then, of course, anyone coming in—and the name! Please forgive me, but are you—"

It was coming, the usual question. Hilary braced himself to meet it. A wave of stinging red was driven up into his face from some fury hitherto unsuspected.

"—are you the Mr. Cliffe who wrote 'The Devil a Monk Would Be'?"

"Yes," said Lawrence Cliffe's son.

He did not mean to say it; he had not known that he was going to say it. But he was not sorry, not in the very least. The nonentity, the cypher, had revolted at last.

"Oh," gasped the girl, enormously impressed. "And is that the same, then—no, it isn't, is it? I mean, you aren't the Mr. Cliffe who wrote 'Not at Home to Hannibal'?"

"Yes," said Christopher Cliffe's father.

HE was coolly amused at himself, now that he had burst the tether which had held him to a negative personality. Now that by violence, by betrayal, by deception, and a few other primitive sins, he had seized not only one but two glories that were not rightfully his. Now that he recognised that he had been jealous of them both:

jealous of his father, jealous of his son; jealous of their fame.

Sometimes it skips a generation.

Overwork? Nonsense! No man had ever yet turned his back upon life from overwork. That worry, that discontent, that nausea of the day which hung grimly about your spirit when you woke in the morning, that sick, irritable desire to snap at everybody and destroy their serenity and content, as your own was mysteriously destroyed—that was not born of overwork. Much more likely that it was born of work which did not matter enough, of that tormenting wish to be important, and of that contrast which always went on, contrast on his right, contrast on his left: “Are you the Cliffe who wrote—?” And then, beginning all over again: “Then you are the Cliffe who wrote—”—nagging and nagging away at his self-respect.

And both of them were so kind to him, Lawrence and Christopher.

Strange, that by what he had just done Hilary Cliffe should at last have established his kinship with both the elder and the younger generation. By just such an unexpected act of falsehood, impulsive, sardonic, delightfully irresponsible, would old Lawrence have forced a credulous world to pay him back for years of loss. By just such a flash of recognition, facing a psychological truth stripped of platitudes, would Christopher have admitted to himself that he had been jealous for a long, long time.

Consequences? Hilary did not care a green fig for

consequences. He was just going to enjoy himself. He felt rather drunk and altogether happy.

Of course, he was lionised in the hotel, after his confession. "The awfully jolly little group who had been there some time and who all knew each other" were thrilled at finding such a celebrity staying among them, and not even incognito, so that they did not have to pretend tiresomely that they were not aware of his prestige as a dramatist and a novelist and a poet. In fact, Mr. Cliffe was delightfully get-at-able, delightfully genial—though they agreed privately that he was not so modest as they had always been led to suppose very distinguished men were! And it is an indisputable fact that Hilary's behaviour was more than a little conceited, and far more conceited than it would have been if he had really been the author of "The Devil a Monk Would Be" and "Not at Home to Hannibal." But he had something to be conceited about: his technique as a robber and as a liar proved quite amazing, even to himself; his enterprises swelled and soared into the air like bold balloons upheld by the winds of sheer confidence. Hilary had discovered that as long as you feel arrogant enough, you can tell any preposterous lie you please, and simply skip the resultant complications.

For instance, in mentioning that sensational party which Lawrence Cliffe had once given in honour of a non-existent poet of the "greenery-yallery" period, whom he had invented to plague Oscar Wilde, Hilary was naturally reminded by one of the fascinated audience—who followed him all over the hotel and sat in clumps

around him—that he must surely have been a very young host in the early 'eighties? Actually, Hilary had been about four when the party had happened. He felt a little giddy, but not alarmingly so; and by dint of sprinkling dates and publications and events like pepper from a pepper-pot, till, metaphorically speaking, his listeners were all sneezing in a cloud of bewilderment, he was able to sneak for his purpose, plumb out of space, an extra six years; then he added nine years on to his own actual age, took eleven years from Lawrence's age at the time of the hoax, and thus gaily got out his sum right!

Afterwards, he found and concealed the hotel copy of "Who's Who."

And thinking he had by now given Lawrence enough of a show, he slid gracefully out of one skin into another, and became Christopher. And produced with a flourish his son's idea of an aristocracy of brains that was to reign in a world of fools; with the disturbing result that within five minutes he was arguing eloquently on the other side. For indeed, he had never agreed with Christopher in this matter, preferring the rather cloudy socialism that had been the fashion when he was an undergraduate.

A learned young man who had been listening earnestly, at intervals shaking his head, now cried out in sharp consternation:

"Yes, but look here, sir, that's the absolute opposite to your doctrine in 'Not at Home to Hannibal'! You can't mean to be going back on yourself like this!"

Hilary nearly said: "Who is myself?" but he realised

he had to do something about "Not at Home to Hannibal," that nearly incomprehensible modern masterpiece; so, throwing off the burden in a way that was lately becoming quite dangerously easy for him, he said: "Oh, but you must have seen that the whole poem was meant as a joke! You didn't take it seriously, did you?"

A nervous murmur rippled round the circle.

"Oh, no!"

"Naturally it was a joke."

"Quite, quite."

And someone fortunately remembered a helpful quotation from a review of the poem, "The Cynicism would not be obvious at the first reading, of course."

Someone else, still more eagerly racing in the wrong direction, said:

"I've heard so many people laughing over it!"

Hilary wondered what Christopher would have thought of that remark.

"But you haven't told us, Mr. Cliffe, what you are writing now?"

"Another long poem," said Hilary, thinking that he had damaged Christopher so much that he could not damage him much more. "Rather in the style of 'Not at Home to Hannibal!'"

"And what's it called?"

He replied that he did not know yet; that he was not quite sure; but that most probably he was going to call it "The Slower Judas."

"By Jove, that's a good title!" The earnest young man whose enthusiasm had been waning now became a dis-

ciple again. "Could you give us an idea what it's about? Not if you'd rather not, of course."

The chorus swelled again.

"Oh, *do* tell us what it's going to be about. It will be so jolly to know before everybody else!"

Hilary had not the remotest idea what "The Slower Judas" was about. He pondered for a moment. "The Slower Judas?" Then his lips twitched into an ironic smile. He looked very like his father at this moment; very like St. Lawrence.

"'The Slower Judas?' Ah, well! It's about a jester in the fifteenth century. He impersonated a monk. And then made a parody of the monk's faith."

He improvised on this theme of his own betrayal of his son. It was taking a risk, but he had grown to love risks. These people would never recognise a plain statement disguised by the cap and bells of the fifteenth century.

"I think the idea is *too* marvellous!" from Erica Leslie.

"So do I. I like it. I'm all for symbolism."

Rather too late, Hilary remembered that Christopher had once told him, after all, what was the theme of "The Slower Judas." It was about St. Paul.

He laughed again, shrugged his shoulders. So this was what it felt like to be on the spree. Not only to be thought a great man, but spontaneously to create greatness for yourself as you go along! To be petted and sought after, yet at the same time to be treated with deference! To swing dizzily above the heads of those mediocrities who had each one no more than his fair share of consequence.

And this was the sort of fun that Lawrence Cliffe had enjoyed during most of his life and which Christopher Cliffe would probably reject for the rest of *his* life. Preposterous, merely to have accepted a lowly stool between their two enthronements!

“Damn Lawrence and damn Christopher!” cried Hilary gaily, when he was alone, and had time to ponder on his crimes.

He dwelt so securely in his glory that he did not bother about what would happen when it all came to an end. Here he was, and here the little hotel on the hill, with its charming but not over-intelligent group of people; and at the foot of the hill, down the track where on either side the blue violets patched the grass between the rough old olive trunks, was the gay little French town, its houses white and lemon and pink; and the sea, brilliantly shimmering—like the lies he had told, those brilliant, shimmering lies!

And then Susannah Vane arrived.

By good fortune, so far, the visitors at the Grand Hotel were of that pleasant, well-to-do, well-bred type who know that authors exist, and hear their names, and see advertised whatever they have written which has caused anything of a sensation; but to whom in any sharper, clearer, more knowing sense, writers are still mysterious beings, magicians whom one practically never encounters in the ordinary world. It was a privilege and an excitement for them to meet the great Cliffe, but they were not at all likely to have known beforehand that there were three Cliffes, and that only two of them were great. Yet, from the way they talked of Susannah Vane—

and most of them remembered her from the year before—Hilary fancied that for this cultured woman of thirty-nine the world of literary personalities might have been more defined. Erica Leslie, his first friend, and Pippin's mistress, told him that Susannah went to first nights and to publishers' dinner-parties.

"So I expect," added Erica, with bright wistfulness, "I expect you and she will have a tremendous lot to say to each other. You must have missed that sort of thing."

Hilary had not missed that sort of thing.

He swaggered slightly, that additional swagger which arises from a faint uneasiness, when Erica Leslie introduced him to Susannah.

"Isn't it wonderful having him here all to ourselves? We're so thrilled! Because it's *the* Mr. Cliffe, Susannah, you know, who wrote 'Not at Home to Hannibal' and 'The Devil a Monk Would Be!'"

"Two kingdoms, sire? How do you manage to rule in both?"

He started—like a burglar detected at a safe. But one look at her reassured him. Her remark was simply a deliciously whimsical comment on the immense difference between these two of his works, just mentioned. She was perceptive and intelligent, this Miss Vane; more intelligent than the others. Much more!

Then he must refine his bluff, for her.

"I don't pretend to rule my kingdoms," he replied to her question. "They rule me." Already his style was deteriorating. "I believe I must have a dual personality."

She nodded her head gravely, to show that dual personalities were to her interesting and acceptable. So Hil-

ary, encouraged, went on expanding the theme. He made quite a good thing out of it. Presently the desire arose in him to be Lawrence and Christopher. Now that he had met Susannah, he wanted to be Hilary as well. He began to insert Hilary, tentatively, between the two usurpers.

That Leslie girl had wandered away. Susannah with a roguish glance, betrayed her:

"She told me that I would find you 'terribly frightening.' Poor little Erica! I expected you to be a sort of literary cave-man!"

"Perhaps I am!"

"I wonder? You look benevolent. But benevolence is sometimes the best disguise."

"Red Riding Hood's wolf," Hilary suggested.

And they laughed, together.

But he hoped that she would not ripple on too long about disguises. An uncomfortable topic.

Susannah Vane was tall, and she carried herself, so Hilary declared fervently, like an Andalusian. She had wide-apart grey eyes—like Pallas Athene remarked Hilary, mixing the Unities—and a sweet mouth, and brown hair which was so abundant that it had to be coiled over each ear and round at the back of her head. And then her voice: "like my mother's" thought Hilary, which was a libel on Susannah, for his mother's had grown mournful under the trial of Lawrence's infidelities; whereas Susannah's voice was tender, but never lachrimose. Nor did she droop towards the protective male, in spite of her pretty habit of appealing to him for advice, for help, for a final opinion. And she listened to Hilary—oh, for

hours! The others had listened to him, too—for now he called all the visitors at the Grand Hotel “the others,” who were not Susannah—but “the others” had listened blindly, whereas Susannah was so intelligent, so subtle, so appreciative and stimulating, so kind, so gentle, so splendid, so womanly.

So understanding.

Not that Hilary had given her anything to understand, as yet. She was the presiding goddess of his temporary kingdom of enchantment. The kingdom would have to dwindle and melt away, but Susannah—perhaps he might keep Susannah? With a rapturous sigh, he pictured her moving about his lonely flat in South Kensington; arranging flowers in the empty vases; sitting in front of the fire, her chin cupped thoughtfully in the palms of her hands, while he read aloud to her what he had just completed—Hilary was by then so far gone that he found it difficult to pull himself out of the imaginary tableau in which he read to her what he had just completed of “The Slower Judas.”

She would have to be told. With every five minutes of talk with her, he knotted his future into fresh complications. His hour of enchantment was passing; he would have to tell Susannah.

So, because he was reluctant to cease being a hero, he prophesied for himself a heroic confession. Hilary rehearsed it constantly: First, draw her out alone with him to where the violets were crushed together in purple array, and then:—“You thought me a great man and a genius, Susannah. But I’m only a beggar and a thief—”

Etcetera.

She would be amazed at first, and horrified. But then, the madonna in her would triumph. She would perceive how he was racked with suffering, how lonely his life had been, how beset with disappointments.

"We don't know beforehand what crimes, what violences are wrung out of us by jealousy. Ah, Susannah—" And there probably he would break down. And she, though still aghast—he would not forfeit this idea of Susannah stunned, incredulous, appalled by his confession; somehow or other he liked it!—she, though still aghast, would enfold and lift him—in the heavenly, cerulean way of women who love deeply and forgive even more deeply and understand more deeply still.

Hilary's fancies grew more lush every sunset.

Until the letter came.

The letter was a fat one, addressed in his father's handwriting. Hilary was surprised; usually the old man did not bother himself with much correspondence. He wandered out on the terrace, opening it. Folded inside his father's was another letter. Hilary stared at it, puzzled, yet dreading to be enlightened. For this enclosure was in Susannah Vane's fluent writing; he recognised it at once.

Which should he read first? He stayed, one letter in either hand, considering. Sword or pistol? Pistol or poison? Then, with a shuddering heart, he chose Susannah's. At least, he would have called it a shuddering heart; actually he was feeling rather sick.

"My dear St. Lawrence—"

So she knew him as well as that! Then she knew that

he, Hilary, was not Lawrence Cliffe? Who; then, did she think he was? Christopher, perhaps? After all, he might still continue to be Christopher.

But by the time he had finished the letter which began "My dear St. Lawrence," it was most ignominiously plain that to her, from the very first moment of his introduction, he had been neither the dramatist who wrote "The Devil a Monk Would Be" ("that was my father"), nor the poet who wrote "Not at Home to Hannibal" ("that is my son"). Susannah Vane had met them both; Christopher only once, it is true; but she and Lawrence Cliffe were fairly intimate. They had been in the same house-party at one of the Loire *chateaux*, and later on they had met accidentally in Venice. She knew him well enough to beg him now to conceal their previous acquaintance, if— "*You see, I'm being frank with you—I needn't be coy and maidenly, need I? With a man's happiness at stake!*")—if Hilary should present her to his father as a future daughter-in-law. She wanted to spare Hilary, in the divine pity which ran like a river under the little waves of a style that was half-merry, half-whimsical—for could one ever be wholly serious with St. Lawrence? She related to him the story of Hilary's double metamorphosis, and told how he had enjoyed it, as a schoolboy enjoys sweet stolen apples; and how everyone in the hotel had been completely taken in, except herself. She had known at once, but had kept her knowledge a secret, surmising that there must be some heartbreaking reason for so good a man to act so wanton a lie. And she had intended never to betray him, either to himself, or to the hotel, or to his father.

Only—for what, again, was the good of pretending? he had fallen in love with her. But at least he should tell her himself, and she would be able, out of her chivalry, to make confession easy for him; he should be most tenderly shriven, and never again allowed to feel small or unimportant or unwanted—“*So remember, St. Lawrence, that this is our conspiracy, yours and mine, and I trust you. You’re a wise old scoundrel, as far as I can remember; wiser than all the Elders rolled into one, so you will realise what it must mean to a poor thirsty fellow who has drunk tepid water all his life, when he has his first rushing fiery taste of deep red wine. So don’t spoil everything, will you, by grudging Hilary his wine from your cellar, even though he had to break down the door?*” She signed her letter “*Susannah.*”

Slowly, Hilary put it down. He did not know that it was possible to be so hurt; pride lay near his feet like a dead bird that would never stir again. Then he took up his father’s letter. His father would be either furious with him, or else mock at him quite mercilessly. He hoped for the former, but feared the latter.

“*Dear Hilary,—This is an infernal woman! For God’s sake don’t marry her. You’d be drowned in wallowing seas of balm and ointment. Hilary, you’re in deadly peril. Imagine what it would be like to be understood for the rest of your life! About as convenient as living in a service flat in the Crystal Palace.*

As for your exploit in passing yourself off as both Christopher and me, it was magnificent. Accept my ap-

preciation and my gratitude. I haven't laughed so much since I first heard of the White Man's Burden. I've always suspected, of course, that you had the same graceless streak as myself. But 'oh my son, Absalom, my son, my son, Absalom' don't surrender to being pathetic.

Susannah doesn't even see that your performance was funny or clever; she thinks it the inarticulate cry of a strangled ego! Go to her in a bluff hearty sort of way, and just say to her: 'Ha, ha you slut! So you saw through me!' poke her in the ribs, leave her for dead, get on the next train, and join me in Rome for a month or two. I'll teach you amply and bountifully what a rest-cure ought to be, without milk and sugar!

"And by the way, I don't think we'll tell Christopher about your escapade. He's a good lad, this son of yours, but I fancy he hasn't quite a grasp on the more evil and attractive side of the Cliffe nature. 'We haven't got much conscience, but what we have is guilty!'—Thank God! To be quite honest with you, Hilary, after three days I discovered the sleeping bore in Christopher. He'll get into plenty of white-hot scrapes, but never a scrape that'll raise a smile. This, however, like your recent hotel idyll, is, as sentimental Sue would say, a dear little, tender little, Blue-bird secret between you and me!

Come along soon,

Your affectionate father,

LAWRENCE CLIFFE."

Hilary stood up. He wanted to shout. He felt as though warm light were streaming through him. He had

never been so happy before. His double rôle as the famous old man and the famous young man—well, that had been intoxicating while it lasted, but it was foredoomed to be a brief, strange glory. But this sudden new affinity between his father and himself, this was real, this would go on. And, most subtle flattery of all—*“To be quite honest with you, Hilary, after three days I discovered the sleeping bore in Christopher.”*—It was clear to him, now, that he had envied less their fame, than the imagined kinship between them, born of their fame. No need to fear, now. He, and he alone was going to his father. His father was pleased with him. He had managed to amuse his father. Ever since he was a child, he had longed for such a privilege, yet not guessing how to win it.

As for Susannah Vane—Hilary remembered her letter and chuckled, irreverently. Heavens, what an escape!

A NOTE ON THE TYPE
IN WHICH THIS BOOK
IS SET

T*HIS book is composed on the Linotype in Bodoni, so-called after its designer, Giambattista Bodoni (1740-1813) a celebrated Italian scholar and printer. He drew his letters with a mechanical regularity that is readily apparent on comparison with the less formal old style. Other characteristics that will be noted are the square serifs without fillet and the marked contrast between the light and heavy strokes.*



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